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# THE INDY PENDENT

A FREE PAPER FOR FREE PEOPLE

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left forum  
2015

## NO JUSTICE NO PEACE

CONFRONTING THE CRISES OF CAPITALISM & DEMOCRACY

MAY 29TH-31ST

FOR MORE INFORMATION, SEE BACK PAGE





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# READER'S VOICE

## A COMMUNIST FRONT GROUP?

Since Veterans for Peace is a communist front organization, it's not surprising to find a died-in-the-wool Marxist spouting communist rhetoric about the Vietnam War (April *Indypendent*, "Don't Thank Me For My Service"). At least he told the truth about one thing — he does not speak for the 3 million Vietnam vets, 80 percent of whom say they would go again, even knowing the outcome.

He's some advice from another vet. If you don't want to celebrate the sacrifices of others, then don't. But don't piss in other people's porridge. You are a small minority. Most vets are proud of their service and what they did in Vietnam and believe in American freedom, not communist tyranny.

— PAUL SCHMEHL

## VETS RETURN FIRE

Paul, I am so sorry you are hurting so bad you'd go back to Viet Nam to have your ass kicked again. You are a tool and a fool to believe Veterans For Peace is any kind of united front about anything except our disdain for war and desire to use our experiences to work for peace. We lost because you can't conquer a nation with invaders and the Vietnamese fought back.

— IMAVETTOO

I joined the U.S. Air Force in July 1970, four days before my 18th birthday, and volunteered for Vietnam. It was my intention to become a "lifer," a career soldier. My father was in the CIA, and in Saigon. My brother Charlie, two years older, was in Cam Ranh Bay. My father signed death warrants on Vietnamese civilians with (in his words) "the full weight of the law behind him." Charlie returned with his Vietnamese wife, two children, and four members of his extended family. It took him 30 years to drink himself to death. The war transformed me into a lifelong fighter for peace, justice and equality. It is those decades of service of which I am proud.

— PATRICK MCCANN

Who's been protecting our freedoms such as they are? I'd say the unnamed brave citizens and soldiers who put their own freedom and careers on the line to speak out for humanity and march against the tide of militarism: the Chelsea Mannings, Dan Ellsbergs, Ann Wrights, Kathy Kellys, Cindy Sheehans, Jane Fondas and Ed Snowdens of the world who have the strength of conscience few possess and acted when it would've been easier not to; the ACLU; a handful in Congress; the laborers who went out on their feet and not on their knees; the teachers and preachers who stood up to the small-minded prejudices of those around them — these and many more unsung are the real heroes of freedom. These are the people whose likenesses should stand in town squares, whom we should celebrate in football stadiums and on a dozen days during the year when we are looking for heroes to honor.

Instead, we have another \$65,000,000 tax dollars going to "commemorate" the Vietnam War and heighten the grip militarism has on our culture so we can feel better about the past, but more

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# THE INDYPENDENT

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## A TALE OF TWO BRONXES

THE MAYOR WANTS TO REMAKE NYC'S POOREST BOROUGH.

importantly, do as we're told in the future. Anyone who opposes such madness and stands with humanity deserves and gets my thanks.

— MIKE FERNER

## UKRAINE'S MISUNDERSTOOD CIVIL WAR

We believe that readers of *The Indypendent* would be interested to know that recently visitors from the Ukraine spoke in NYC about the dire state of Eastern and working-class Ukrainians under attack by the Kiev government, installed by the Maidan uprising in 2014. They were commemorating the massacre of at least 48 people when a fascist mob burned down a trade union building in the city of Odessa. They wanted to provide an alternative to what is reported in the U.S. media, which uniformly misrepresents the Ukrainian conflict as a Russian incursion, and their movement supports neither Ukrainian nor Russian nationalism but primarily wants to live in peace.

These visiting speakers insisted that Easterners took up arms to resist the imposition of the Kiev government on them through a bloody military assault, which reduced their cities to rubble, killed thousands of civilians and forced many more into exile. They asserted that pro-Europe demonstrations were taken over by extreme rightist elements. Moreover, they charged that fascists had been integrated into the Kiev government and army. They also denounced U.S. support for the Kiev government, evidenced in the tape where U.S. representative Victoria Nuland boasts of its longstanding financial contributions to the opposition and the Pentagon's announcement that it is now training the Kiev army. These emissaries, politicized by their oppression, risked considerable danger to spread their message and plead for us to show solidarity with suffering Ukrainians by challenging the U.S. government's propaganda and opposing its deadly intervention.

— JACKIE DiSALVO  
 DOUG FERRARI  
 MANNY NESS

**THE INDYPENDENT**  
 CONTINUE FOLLOWING  
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A woman with dark curly hair, wearing a headband with a floral pattern and a patterned scarf, holds a large white protest sign. The sign has the text "TOP INTERPOLICE" on the first line, "New NYPD" on the second line, and "Black Lives Matter" on the third line. She is also wearing patterned pants. The background is a blurred outdoor setting.

A photograph of a wooden stilt house on a body of water. The house is built on stilts and has a ramp leading down to the water level. The house is made of wood and has a corrugated metal roof. The water is calm and the sky is blue with some clouds.



A cartoon illustration of a man with a large nose and a wide-open mouth, shouting. He is holding a sign that says "ORGANIZE" in bold, capital letters. The man is wearing a suit and tie. The background is a simple, stylized landscape with a hill and a small building. The word "gee" is written in a speech bubble at the bottom right.

A close-up portrait of a woman with dark hair, looking upwards and to the side, wearing a dark jacket.



# CITY COUNCIL, DE BLASIO CLASH OVER PLAN FOR 1,000 MORE COPS

BY NICK MALINOWSKI

**T**he New York City Council's controversial push to add 1,000 new officers to the New York Police Department hit a major snag on May 7, when Mayor Bill de Blasio did not include the \$100-million measure in his \$78.3-billion preliminary executive budget.

The announcement could lead to a public showdown between de Blasio and his police commissioner, William Bratton, who is left in a potentially humiliating position after making the media rounds to say the new cops were pretty much a done deal.

The mayor has left the back door open for a compromise on the issue, though any movement would indicate purely political motivations now that he has laid out his own budget priorities.

"We will certainly have a thorough process with the council, and you know, we'll be very open to finding a compromise — which is what we do in the legislative process," De Blasio said during a press conference with reporters following his budget presentation.

Over the past several months, community activists have blasted the council's plan with disruptions in City Council chambers, online petitions and social media campaigns targeting the proposal, which would cost the city at least \$1 billion over the next decade, based on cost estimates provided by City Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverti. The activists argue that the money should be put toward community needs such as a youth jobs program, mental health care and schools. Put on the defensive, the City Council added a sentence on youth jobs to its official budget request for the new cops.

The final budget is due at the end of June and it will be interesting to see which social service cuts the generally progressive City Council puts on the chopping block in its efforts to secure the additional officers.

Bratton is scheduled to testify before the council on May 21 to defend his budget request; his last visit induced fireworks from the public and editorials detailing how a historically combative City Council seemed to be making efforts to defend, praise and placate both Bratton and the NYPD.

De Blasio said he's happy with the NYPD's current performance and does not see a need to increase the department's headcount — currently 49,000, with 34,500 uniformed officers, and the largest in the United States at roughly four times the size of the Los Angeles Police Department. He generally supports the status quo in

policing, bristling at most calls for reform while backing Bratton's "broken windows" style of high-energy enforcement of low-level crimes and violations.

Reductions in stop and frisk activities — the result of a federal ruling castigating the practice as illegal — and decreases in misdemeanor arrests and summonses have freed up time for the cops already on the force to pursue other objectives, de Blasio said.

Mark-Viverito has been the loudest voice in support of hiring new officers. She, along with other council progressives, requested 1,000 new officers last year, in response to an uptick in shootings in public housing in the Bronx. At the time, that plan was swiftly swatted down by Bratton, who said it was both fiscally impossible and unnecessary from a tactical perspective.

This year, Mark-Viverito pivoted on her justification for the new officers, saying more cops were needed to keep crime down while taking a more proactive role in "community policing." Perhaps seeking an opportunity to resolve the conflict between de Blasio and the police unions catalyzed by the shooting deaths of two officers this winter, Bratton reversed his position and came along.

What community policing actually means, however, remains a question of debate. At a recent public event Mark-Viverito declined to give her own definition of the term when asked on camera by a constituent. NYPD Deputy Susan Herman has described a pilot program for a small cadre of officers to roam around communities talking to people and charting their concerns; Assistant Chief Terrence Monahan told the City Council in March that "community policing" is what the NYPD has always done. Regardless, Bratton, not the City Council, will determine how any new officers will be deployed. Given his track record, it's unlikely they would be ordered to spend their time getting cats out of trees and helping senior citizens cross busy streets.

Following the budget announcement, Bratton explained that new officers were required for heightened counterterrorism details to ward off attacks from the Islamic State (ISIS). Councilmember Rory Lancman, of Queens, who just last month said the new police were essential for community policing, tweeted on May 12 that now the need was in counterterrorism and crime prevention.

While Bratton's support for more cops makes sense (de Blasio has said that every one of his commissioners asks for more resources), the council's position is hard to understand. It seem-

ingly conflicts with the body's reform agenda of a reduced role for the NYPD, while the justifications for the additional expense change on a regular basis. During a recent roundtable hosted by NY1, analysts described the council's position on the new cops as "incoherent" and "fake."

Recently, a group of mainstream nonprofits, many aligned closely with the speaker and other members of the City Council, also came out against the proposal. So far, councilmembers have not been able to produce a single community group that supports their plan, leading some to suggest the whole thing is simply a political gift to the NYPD, which is otherwise frustrated with council's reform agenda.

Mark-Viverito is in another highly publicized dispute with Bratton about moving a small number of criminal violations, such as drinking alcohol in public or being in a park after dark, into civil court, where they would be adjudicated in a manner similar to traffic tickets.

The apparent rift between de Blasio and his commissioner is surprising. Despite a few unsubstantiated news reports of behind-the-scenes disagreements, the two have generally put on a united public front, seeming at times to bend over backwards to support one another as critiques have come in, predictably, from both the left and the right. De Blasio has granted Bratton almost unfettered control over policing.

At a hearing before the New York State Assembly on May 7, Elizabeth Glazer, who runs the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice — the wing of his administration that oversees the police department — acknowledged that Bratton has complete control over the NYPD and that her office, tasked with departmental oversight, has an insignificant role.

*Nick Malinowski is a social worker and activist based in Brooklyn.*



## HOW ABOUT A HIRING FREEZE?:

A woman protests outside NYPD headquarters at 1 Police Plaza on April 3.

CINDY TRINH



# RENT HIKE FIGHT

BY STEVEN WISHNIA

**T**HE SOUTH BRONX MET THE liberal policy wonks of the de Blasio administration April 29, and the Bronx lost.

As more than 200 people chanting “Rent Rollback” filled an auditorium at City University Graduate Center, most in community-group contingents from the Bronx and upper Manhattan, the city Rent Guidelines Board rejected a proposal to recommend that rents be reduced by up to 4 percent for the city’s 1 million rent-stabilized apartments next year, by a 7-2 vote. Instead, it voted 5-4 to recommend allowing increases of zero to 2 percent for a one-year lease and 0.5 to 3.5 percent for two years. For hotels, it recommended a rent freeze.

The vote indicates that the RGB is leaning toward setting a small increase when it votes on the final guidelines for next year on June 24, rather than the rent freeze Bill de Blasio promised while running for mayor in 2013. The guidelines will cover leases for apartments or lofts renewed on or after October 1.

“De Blasio said he was going to do something. I don’t see it,” Bronx resident Joseph Cepeda, 52, told board chair Rachel Godsil after the vote. “My parents got hit with three MCIs last year. You think that’s right? It’s a \$200 increase. They’re 90 and 86, they live on a fixed income.”

“I know that’s real money,” Godsil answered softly before leaving.

The vote was “extremely disappointing,” said Fitzroy Christian of Community Action for Safe Apartments, an organization based in the working-class neighborhoods north of Yankee Stadium. “Even though we did not expect the public members to vote for a rollback, we thought their numbers would have been a lot more realistic about the economic conditions New Yorkers face.”

The South Bronx has among the highest concentrations of rent-stabilized

apartments in the city. Rents are relatively low, but still high when compared to people’s incomes — \$1,100 a month isn’t cheap when you make \$520 a week. Landlords there also commonly use major capital improvements to raise rents on apartments where people aren’t moving.

Tenant groups had pushed for a rent rollback on the grounds that under the Bloomberg administration, the RGB had regularly granted increases far larger than were needed to keep landlords solvent. Last year, according to board figures, the “projected increase of owners’ costs,” its index to predict prices for running a building, went up by only 0.5 percent, the lowest in the last decade.

“While last year’s rent increase was one of the smallest in New York’s history, it wasn’t enough to stop the loss of rent-stabilized housing that is truly affordable,” the Metropolitan Council on Housing said in a statement before the meeting. “A rent rollback is the only action that is strong enough to bring relief to the over 1 million families that rely on strong rent regulations.”

Godsil told the crowd that she voted against the rent rollback because stability “is crucial for the housing stock of New York,” and that it is “just not the case” that “all owners are rolling in money.” The five public members then all voted for her proposal without saying a word. The board’s two tenant representatives voted no because they thought it was too high. The two landlord representatives also voted no, after the board nixed their proposal for higher increases. (Owner representative Sara Williams Willard had argued that the board’s cost projections weren’t reliable because they had been diminished by a dramatic drop in fuel prices last year).

That lockstep vote was uncomfortably reminiscent of the Bloomberg era for tenant member Sheila Garcia, also a Bronx resident, who called the vote

*Continued on page 14*

**TENANTS FIRST:** More than 1,500 tenants marched across the Brooklyn Bridge on May 14 calling on the Rent Guidelines Board and the State Legislature to take action on behalf of NYC’s rent-stabilized tenants.



CINDY TRINH



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# A LEAGUE OF THEIR OWN

BY ALEX ELLEFSON

**O**ne of the first things 17-year-old Abiboulaye Diagne shows friends who visit his home is the collection of gleaming championship medals hanging on the hat rack in his room. Diagne immigrated to New York from Senegal two years ago and played as midfielder on his school soccer team.

“WHEN I SHOW THEM ALL THE MEDALS they are like, ‘Wow, you’re here only two years and you have all these medals?’” he said. “Winning made me proud.”

But this year, Diagne’s championship-winning soccer team is gone. It was eliminated along with the baseball and softball teams at his South Bronx high school, where almost all the students are immigrants from Africa or South America.

Diagne and his teammates at International Community High School (ICHHS) want their sports teams back. They are holding the New York City Department of Education responsible and argue that the branch of the DOE that oversees interscholastic sports, the Public Schools Athletic League (PSAL), has violated civil rights laws by not giving students of color the same opportunities to play sports as their white peers.

In March, Diagne and nearly 100 other ICHHS students staged a protest directed at Schools Chancellor Carmen Fariña just as she was about to speak at a City Council budget hearing. From the balcony of the council chamber, they raised black-gloved fists in the air, referencing the Black Power salute at the 1968 Olympics, and unfurled a large white banner that declared: “#civilrightsmatter.”

For the students and the three educators who helped organize the protest, this was an act of civil disobedience: They had defied an order from the DOE warning them to not hold the demonstration. The students were told if they missed school to attend the hearing, they might receive an unexcused absence and a call home, even though their parents had all signed permission slips allowing them to go. The three educators who helped organize and supervise the protest, the DOE warned, risked “disciplinary action which may include dismissal from employment.”

David Garcia-Rosen, the dean at ICHHS, said he and his colleagues were aware that they were putting their careers on the line.

“The three of us said: if we lose our jobs, we lose our jobs. But we’re not going to continue to cash DOE paychecks every two weeks knowing that it’s a paycheck doused in civil rights violations,” Garcia-Rosen told *The Independent*.

The day after the protest, Garcia-Rosen and the school’s counselor, Maria Damato, were called into the principal’s office, where they were told they had been relieved of their positions while the DOE conducted an investigation. The media arts teacher, Ralph Figaro, who was hired through an outside agency without any union protection, was fired.

For Garcia-Rosen, this is one of many clashes with the DOE. He has filed a civil rights complaint against the New York City school system. His school-related expenditures have been subjected to an audit, and he says a high-ranking DOE executive called him a “Marxist” for suggesting that sports funding be distributed more equitably.

In 2011, after his requests for baseball and cricket

teams were denied by the PSAL, Garcia-Rosen founded the Small School Athletics League (SSAL), so that students at his school, which has fewer than 400 students, could play sports and compete with other teams. He found principals at seven other schools to contribute money from their budgets to pay for equipment and jerseys. Within three years, the league’s membership exploded to include 90 teams from 42 small high schools.

Garcia-Rosen said he witnessed an extraordinary transformation in some of the students who participated in the SSAL. Kids who had dropped out of school suddenly appeared in his office asking if they could join the new baseball team. He pointed out that the PSAL would never have allowed those students to play baseball because the league had strict behavior and attendance policies.

“The SSAL had such a profound affect on the most at-risk students who the PSAL continues to slam the door on,” he said. “We didn’t care if you’d been absent for the past three weeks, we didn’t care if you’d been suspended, we didn’t care if you’d been arrested and we didn’t care if you dropped out.”

Instead, all students were eligible to sign up for sports. But once they joined a team, they were expected to turn in signatures from all their teachers to prove they were completing their schoolwork, passing their tests and showing up for class.

Eighteen-year-old Guitti Muhammed, a junior at ICHHS, said that before he joined the soccer team, he would sleep late and miss his morning classes. He wasn’t keeping up with his homework and he would fight with other students.

“I was a troublemaker,” he said. “But playing was really important to me. Everybody has a passion. My passion is playing sports.”

The SSAL’s success got noticed. In 2012, the PSAL’s executive director, Donald Douglas, called Garcia-Rosen to discuss the new league. Douglas asked for a study to assess the need for interscholastic sports at small high schools. Eight months later, Garcia-Rosen produced a 17-page report for the PSAL that compared data from the DOE about student enrollment with information from the PSAL about the distribution of sports teams.

## STARTLING DISPARITIES

His report revealed startling disparities in the way the PSAL awards sports teams: Neighborhoods with the highest concentrations of poverty and students of color had the least number of PSAL-funded sports teams.

In Staten Island, where almost half of public school students are white, 95 percent of students go to a public high school with at least 20 sports teams. Meanwhile, only 32 percent of students in the Bronx, where white students account for barely 3 percent of total enrollment, go to a high school with that many sports programs. Across the city, almost one-third of the students who attended the most segregated schools, where they had no white classmates, had no opportunities to play sports.

City Councilmember Andy King, who represents a district in the northeast Bronx, said that students of color were being deprived of important opportunities by not having access to sports. After excelling in sports at Evander Childs High School in the Bronx, King attended Midwestern State University in Texas on a basketball scholarship before transferring to Wil-

liam Paterson College in New Jersey, where he led his school to three straight conference championships.

“As a high schooler, I enjoyed playing sports,” King told *The Independent*. “And it taught me so many things, especially a value system that young people need growing up.”

And with college education becoming increasingly unaffordable, especially for students from low-income families, King said it was important to provide students with opportunities, like sports, that could encourage them to seek scholarships and consider going to college.

“We ask people to take higher levels of education. But not everyone can afford higher education, especially as it has become so expensive,” said King. “So how do you say we want people to be smarter and get more education but then we chop down the roads that can get them there?”

New York City has one of the most segregated school systems in the country, according to a study done last year by the University of California at Los Angeles’s Civil Rights Project. And the disparities in race and class are not limited to sports. Last year, New York City Comptroller Scott Stringer released a report that found school districts with the least access to art education were concentrated in low-income, minority neighborhoods.

## THE PROBLEM WITH SMALL SCHOOLS

Garcia-Rosen attributes some of the disparities in sports and art programs to the small schools movement that began almost 20 years ago and was accelerated under the Bloomberg administration. The city has dismantled many of its large, comprehensive high schools that were once located in low-income, minority neighborhoods. The comprehensive schools, like Evander Childs, which closed in 2008, were deemed to be too big and impersonal to meet students’ individual needs. Yet, these high schools also had the large student bodies and economies of scale that made it possible to offer a wide array of extracurricular activities.

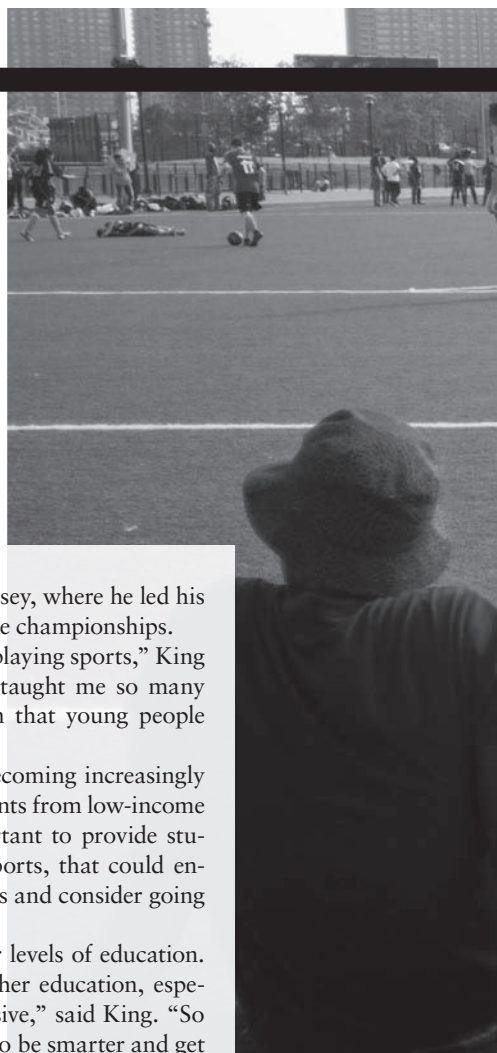
The small schools have filled the void often with fewer than 100 students per grade. International Community High School, which is co-located with a middle school, has fewer than 400 students. Garcia-Rosen said that the PSAL, which has existed for more than a century, is structured to award sports teams to large schools with a traditional campus.

“What clearly wasn’t taken into account was that you can’t really have a high school if you don’t have a high school facility,” said Garcia-Rosen. “And when you concentrate these small schools in segregated areas, now you’ve created a separate, segregated school system. And you wind up with separate and unequal.”

Garcia-Rosen said that the PSAL responded to his report on inequality by offering to give his school sports teams, even though they had denied his request for sports teams almost two years earlier. They also offered him a job at the PSAL.

“It was infuriating. I never wanted a job at the PSAL,” said Garcia-Rosen. “It seems like if you make enough noise or if you have a politician behind you, then you get teams. Otherwise, you can’t even get [the PSAL] to call you back.”

Garcia-Rosen rejected the PSAL’s job offer and instead began lobbying the City Council to fund the SSAL. Teams in the SSAL had been supported with money from their principal’s budgets, but that model wasn’t sustainable or fair. That money could have







VANIMU UENGETOS

gone to hiring new teachers or buying supplies.

In June 2014, his effort appeared to bear fruit. The City Council had agreed to provide \$825,000 in the final city budget agreement to go toward sustaining the SSAL. And the non-profit A PLUS Youth Program had promised to provide matching funds. However, just as the new school year was about to begin, the DOE unexpectedly announced that the City Council's money had been given to the PSAL, in order to create its own small schools athletic league.

After it became clear last fall that the SSAL would not receive any money from the city, A PLUS Youth Program also walked away, and the SSAL was forced to cancel its upcoming season. The students at ICHS lost their treasured soccer, baseball and softball teams.

The PSAL used the City Council's \$825,000 to rebrand two of its existing leagues, which have served as a transitional stage for new teams entering the PSAL. The PSAL's developmental league became SSAL Developmental and its Transfer League was renamed the Multiple Pathways League and given modified academic eligibility requirements in order to give more students a chance to play.

According to a DOE spokesperson, SSAL Developmental has added 109 new teams this year and is focused on "catering to the unique needs of small schools."

But the teams awarded to ICHS were not nearly as popular. Instead of baseball and softball, they received volleyball and track and field. Instead of soccer, the PSAL gave them table tennis. And the new sports teams were all scheduled to compete in the fall, which meant that the students at ICHS had no sports to play for half the year.

Out of the 90 teams that played last year in the SSAL, only 27 are still active after being absorbed by the PSAL.

Even some of the students who wanted to play on the new teams said they were not happy the PSAL had eliminated sports their peers wanted to play.

"The sport I like to do is track," said 18-year-old ICHS student Shaffiou Assoumanou, who participated in the March protest at City Hall. "But most people in our school, the sports that they like are baseball and basketball and soccer. Track really does not matter to them. So even though I have track, I'm not just standing up for myself, there are still some students who don't have any sports."

After the students learned that the DOE had pulled their teachers out of school for helping them organize their demonstration, scores of stu-

dents participated a walkout and traveled down to the DOE offices in Lower Manhattan, where they stood for hours in the rain. No one from the DOE came out to speak with the protesting students.

Since then, they have gathered outside City Hall every Wednesday after school. The sound of their plastic bucket drums thunders across City Hall Park while the students hold up their big white banner for city officials who walk by.

"If it's raining, it's snowing, whatever is happening, even if there's a hurricane, we're going to head out here and protest because I believe in civil disobedience," said ICHS student Fatou Boye. "I'm not fighting for myself, I'm fighting for those people who are going to come next. Because Martin Luther King and Malcolm X and Nelson Mandela, they fought for the next generation"

When City Councilman Jumaane Williams (D-East Flatbush) stopped and chatted with the demonstrators, he told *The Independent* he expected the City Council's \$825,000 was going directly to the SSAL.

"We're being told that somehow the funding went to the PSAL and never trickled back down to the kids we wanted it to get to. If that's the case, it's pretty troubling," he said.

Williams noted that at the same time the students were demonstrating outside City Hall, thousands of New Yorkers were assembling in Union Square to protest the death of Freddie Gray, who suffered a fatal spine injury while in the custody of Baltimore police.

"This is not just an education or a sports issue, this is about inequitable resources in many things," Williams said. "Probably the only thing that's not inequitable, is the distribution of police. I think, if we were more equitable with other resources, we wouldn't need the police resources as much."



ALEXELLEFSON



CINDY TRINH

**SIDELINED:** Students from International Community High School look out on a South Bronx athletic field where their school's soccer team used to play.

**TEAMWORK:** Using plastic bucket drums, International Community High School students protest outside City Hall each Wednesday after school. They say the DOE has misappropriated \$825,000 in funds that the City Council allocated last year to support the Small School Athletics League. From left to right: Abiboulaye Diagne, 17, junior; Alseny Sow, 18, senior; Fatou Boye, 17, junior; John Bole Kailsa, 19, junior; Alhassane Sow, 18, senior; Sory Konate, 20, senior.

**PRINCIPLED:** David Garcia-Rosen, dean of students at International Community High School, was suspended by the Department of Education for backing his students' protests to save their sports program.



# BALTIMORE, AFTER THE RIOTS

BY SHAWN CARRIÉ

**BALTIMORE** — *Before the riots hit, Baltimore was already a troubled place. It is one of the most segregated cities in America, where boarded-up buildings line entire blocks. It was here that Freddie Gray lived for 25 years before he died in the custody of Baltimore police and the city erupted in protest this April. The last time riots broke out on the streets of Baltimore was in April 1968, in the days following the assassination of Martin Luther King.*

A RIOT IS AN UGLY THING. Its violence is too unfocused, too turbulent to be political, even if its origins are. The explosion in Baltimore's streets started as an expression of the collective rage of black teenagers smashing cop cars and defiantly stepping up to lines of riot police, heaving bricks into their flimsy plastic shields from only yards away. Then it devolved into something else. Glass shattered and crowds poured out of the storefronts, turning their attention to what they could take for themselves. The rioters' fury, however, didn't come out of nowhere.

On April 19, Freddie Gray became the seventh person to have a fatal encounter with Baltimore police in the past year. He had been arrested and suffered a severe spinal injury while in police custody on April 12 before falling into a coma from which he did not recover. The demands for answers would rise as those outraged over his death joined a chorus of communities engaging in a similar struggle around the nation. With this continuing unrest, Baltimore has joined the growing list of cities synonymous with an increasingly vocal national conversation around police brutality and a broken criminal justice system. Simultaneous protests in a dozen major cities around the time of the upheaval in Baltimore signaled that the issue isn't going to disappear, and that a long summer lies ahead.

Justice in cases of police killings is hard to come by. Of the hundreds of officer-involved shootings every year, few make national or even local headlines. There are scarcely charges, much less convictions, for cops who kill unarmed civilians, frustrating community activists who see these incidents repeating themselves far too often.

Gray's death has catalyzed calls for justice from a system that for years has favored police officers who kill in the line of duty in a city where the issue is painfully familiar. Comparisons to Ferguson abound, and a common thread connects the stories of unarmed black men killed by police. "This is a reminder that there's a Mike Brown in every town," said Deray McKesson, an activist, educator and Baltimore native.

"What happened around the corner with Freddie Gray was the epitome of something that's happened to almost everybody out here in this neighborhood," said Perry Hopkins, a community activist in West Baltimore. "We have accepted that behavior for so long, and when that young man lost his life, it re-opened those wounds to everybody in this community, because just about everybody has been a victim, been beaten or accosted by the police," Hopkins added. "The overriding sentiment is, 'enough is enough.'"

## TWO BALTIMORES

Living in Sandtown-Winchester, where Freddie Gray called home, many of the people describe the feeling as "boxed in." Budget cuts have closed down two schools here, and 23 across the city, in recent years. Recreation centers where young people could go to be off the street

have also been shuttered for lack of funds. Meanwhile, in 2011, the state of Maryland allocated \$26 million to build two new prisons outside Baltimore.

The mayor of Baltimore and other civic and business leaders have started a "One Baltimore" campaign to reunify the city — but residents tell a different story of two very different Baltimores. "There are nice neighborhoods on the other side of town. We have our own little Hollywood Hills over there.

But the ghetto is the ghetto," said Michael Lowery. Working as a bail bondsman, he understands the environment many of his clients live in and came out to support the protests. "A lot of the younger men, they have to do what they have to do to make money and survive, because a lot of them don't know anything better. They have to take it to the streets because they don't know anything else," Lowery added.

A study by Johns Hopkins University backs up what he is feeling: it ranked Baltimore the seventh most segregated city in America. Just six miles separate well-to-do Roland Park and Hollins Market, and there is a 20-year difference in the average life expectancy of their residents.

Baltimore was one of the cities hardest hit by the 2008 crash of the housing market, and thousands of homes stand abandoned, primarily in the city's majority-black west end. Far from the downtown job center and underserved by public transportation, work and educational opportunities are thin. In some neighborhoods, as many as one in four residents are unemployed.

For some, there isn't much to do but stand around on the corner, and crime and drugs are the biggest job creators. People speak openly about how on the day after the first riots, a black market of new low-cost merchandise appeared the streets. They are unabashedly pragmatic about this informal economy: the prices are a steal, there's no shortage of customers and it's pure profit for the brazen vendors that are looking for any possible way to "come up."

Sandtown-Winchester is the city's poorest neighborhood, with an alarming rate of incarceration and an unemployment rate double that of the rest of the city. There, Gray grew up in a house with chipping lead paint, in a neighborhood where the unemployment rate is almost four times the national average. Almost one in four households have an incarcerated family member. Indeed, many people belong to gangs — but those gangs are also part of the community.

In the days after the riots broke out, gang members who normally vie for control of the streets worked together to maintain order. "We don't need the police, we can protect our own community," said a man calling himself Legacy. "Probably the majority of people out here got kids. They don't want to see their kids end up another dead victim of the police. We're tired of it. We had to come together to prove that we're tired of it."

Communal moments that brought a human warmth to streets that have seen so much violence helped to soothe the stunned feelings hanging over Baltimore after the riots. Meanwhile, an inspired generation of newly politicized activists debated strategy and how to build organizational capacity with community leaders, clergyman and organizers. New coalitions have formed, hoping to turn Baltimore's crisis moment into a new movement to effect change.

One of these efforts is a coalition of both new and old community-based organizations called Baltimore United For Change (BUC). A partnership of old guard black leaders, radical faith leaders and seasoned police brutality activists, BUC tells newcomers that they are in for a long fight. One of the groups in BUC, the Tyrone West Coalition, has been pushing for transparency from Baltimore police since the summer of 2013, when unarmed Tyrone West was severely beaten and died in police custody. Two years later, his family says it still has not received a full autopsy report, and an investigation led by a Virginia-based law enforcement consultant cleared the involved officers of any wrongdoing.

"Everyone is part of the equation. No one is left out, not old, young, gangs — everyone's affected. We're gonna do this with everybody," said Reverend Jamal Bryant. Speaking at Freddie Gray's funeral at New Shiloh Baptist Church, he and other preachers gave impassioned speeches, declaring that the protests calling for justice were a righteous cause. He said that on the weekend after the riots he saw more people in church than he had in years, and many familiar faces had returned seeking fellowship.

## A BOOST FOR THE GRASSROOTS

Existing grassroots organizations are also getting a much-needed boost in attention to the work they have been doing in Baltimore communities as a result of the media presence around the riots. Chris Goodman, now a community leader and a hip-hop artist, started working with the Baltimore Algebra Project while he was in eighth grade, tutoring students a year younger than him. He saw the new wave of young people coming out in the streets as an opportunity to gain visibility, recruit new people and bring them into something meaningful.

When support started pouring in from around the country, the Algebra Project managed to raise \$80,000 from crowdfunding donations to expand its tutoring programs and work toward improving the quality of life in West Baltimore. Following their motto of "No education, no life," activists like Goodman hope to empower young people and keep them out of trouble by arming them with knowledge.

"In any community that's dealing with poverty, there's a natural fear of the police. It's real," Goodman described. "It feels like a constant pressure, knowing that, and feeling that the world is against you — and just trying to figure out that puzzle, how to break through, how to survive."

The violent tactics of the Baltimore Police Department have left city taxpayers to pick up the tab — about \$5.7 million in legal settlements involving more than 100 cases against the department since 2011. With this in mind, activists are skeptical of authorities' promises of justice for Freddie Gray and meaningful changes in their communities. "The mayor has not attempted to enact policies that dramatically improved the quality of life for black people here in Baltimore," said Dayvon Love, research director at the grassroots organization Leaders of a Beautiful Struggle.

While the fault lines in Ferguson became notorious for the city's predominantly white city government and police force in a majority-black township, Baltimore is different. Its mayor and police commissioner are black, as is a large part of the police force and even the state attorney who







SHAWN CARRE

has decided to charge the officers involved in Gray's death. But activists still see work to be done in combatting racial oppression in their city's political landscape.

"Our mayor is someone who has capitulated to the corporate structure of the Democratic Party and the corporate interests in our city," Love said. "What happens in our society is often times individual black people are put in positions of power within white-dominated institutions, which brings more black people into those institutional arrangements, undermining our ability to develop communal, independent black institutions."

When prosecutors announced there would be charges for the six officers who arrested Gray, ranging from official misconduct to depraved heart murder, the protests became a celebration, at least for a moment. Still, protesters remain skeptical about whether the system can produce justice in the courtroom or in their embattled communities. Deray McKesson expressed his view of it bluntly: "Justice is a living Mike Brown. Justice is a smiling Tamir Rice. Justice is no more death."

After the first night of riots, authorities including President Obama and the mayor of Baltimore hurried to draw a line between acceptable, legitimate

forms of protest and breaking, burning and tearing into places of business. Few on the protesters' side rushed to condone, but it was just as hard for them to condemn what happened without looking at the bigger picture.

"What we're saying," argued McKesson, "is 'you're killing us, and we will continue to disrupt until we get to live,' and I think that's only fair."

For now, an uneasy calm holds in Baltimore. The public mourning, spontaneous riots and daily marches have subsided, and the television cameras packed up and left. Old problems haven't dissipated — the poverty, the lack of opportunity, the seemingly inescapable struggle to survive in a city with one of the country's highest murder rates. But the feeling of community gathering lingers, and the people of Baltimore continue to discuss and debate recent events and whether the inspired words of protest will prove to be fleeting rhetoric or if the city can move forward and resolve its long-standing problems. What remained to be cleaned up after the riots subsided was more than two days' worth of destruction — but that pales in comparison to the injuries that need healing after years of violence.

#### BLACK LIVES MATTER:

In West Baltimore, a protest against the institutionalized violence that Black children face when they come into the world.

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**“It is an absolute outrage that Chelsea Manning is currently languishing behind bars whilst those she helped to expose, who are potentially guilty of human rights violations, enjoy impunity.”**

**Erika Guevara Rosas**  
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30 July 2014

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*Ad designed and published by the Chelsea Manning Support Network*

## IRAN **War or Peace?**

The U.S. and five other countries are about to conclude an agreement with Iran that will settle differences over Iran's nuclear energy programs.

The agreement will go a long way toward normalizing relations with Iran and establish a regimen of inspection that will guarantee Iran cannot build nuclear weapons.

If successful, the agreement will help calm the Middle East, a region that is boiling with crisis.

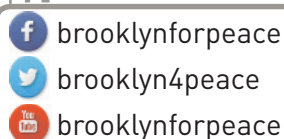
**The Republicans want to kill the agreement with Iran, but they can't do it without help from Democrats!**

**We need to give diplomacy & peace in the Mid-East a chance!**

**Stand up to efforts in Congress to scuttle the agreements!**

**Call Senators Gillibrand & Schumer and your reps at 877-762-8762!**

**Ask them to support the President and diplomacy, not war!**



## POLICE BRUTALITY

# TERROR IN THE BACK OF THE POLICE VAN

## MY 'ROUGH RIDE' EXPERIENCE

By GAN GOLAN

The “rough ride” is a common tactic used by U.S. police. It is real, incredibly dangerous and totally illegal. It has received more scrutiny since the death of Freddie Gray from injuries he received while being driven around in the back of a Baltimore police van. But since most members of the media who write about “rough rides” have not been in such a position, I’ll share a personal story.

Several years ago when I was a graduate student at MIT on a research trip to Miami, I attended a jail solidarity vigil the day after major protests outside a gathering of hemispheric leaders who were discussing the Free Trade Area of the Americas. Jail solidarity is a traditional tactic from the Civil Rights Movement meant to safely secure the release of arrested protesters. It is completely nonviolent.

To our surprise, the entire group I was with was surrounded by riot police and unlawfully arrested (as a judge later confirmed). The arrestees (after being beaten and pepper-sprayed while in custody — another violation of the law) were loaded up into police vans. There were about a dozen of us in the van. Hands cuffed behind our backs. No seat belts.

Once moving, to our surprise, the van immediately shot off like a bullet, to the point that we all began sliding toward the back of the vehicle, sending some of us into a panic. Then we came to a sudden, screeching halt. Bodies went sliding across the van as we smacked up against the steel walls of the enclosure, as well as each other. Our hands were cuffed behind our backs, so we were defenseless from the impacts, which is a terrifying feeling. We actually cushioned each others’ impact, like human airbags. I was lucky. I was near the back.

Unable to see out from the van, we actually assumed the van had just been in some sort of car accident.

Then it happened again. Speeeeee up — BRAKES!!! Speeeeee up — BRAKES!!! Over and over. By that point, I was on the floor on my back. We quickly figured out a way brace ourselves by intertwining all of our bodies. The guy closest to the front wall screamed at the drivers through the steel barrier separating us: “What the fuck is going on?!!!”

Then we heard it: the sound of the two officers driving the van whooping and hollering like bandits. What was happening was not just intentional. For them, this was a joy ride.

Now, to be clear, what happened to us is nothing compared to what the police did to Freddie Gray. Beforehand, they didn’t just beat and cuff him, they crippled him. He was then left alone on his half of the van with nothing to secure or cushion his body from impacts. He was possibly even unconscious at the time. The “rough ride” was so severe they broke the man’s spine. His fucking spine!

I share my own experience simply to underscore how pervasive this practice is. It was clear to me even at the time that if the police felt they could do this to a bunch of privileged, college-educated students — and be fully confident they would get away with it — it was inconceivable

**THEN WE HEARD IT: THE SOUND OF THE TWO OFFICERS DRIVING THE VAN WHOOPING AND HOLLERING LIKE BANDITS.**

what they were doing to others.

I remember one Miami officer stating at the time, “You can beat the rap, but you can’t beat the ride.” It was a cute way of saying: “A court of law may find that you were not guilty of anything, but it doesn’t matter because we are delivering punishment right here, right now...and there’s nothing you can do about it.”

That’s not just illegal. It defies the very concept of a justice system. If you ever find yourself confused as to why people are out in the streets, and so angry, understand that this is a reason why.

One of a thousand reasons.





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# CUBA EVOLVING

By CONOR TOMÁS REED

HAVANA, CUBA — *In El Callejón de Hamel, a dazzling alleyway in Central Havana, rumba musicians have performed every Sunday for more than two decades. When I approached it one afternoon in early March, the walls were festooned with Salvador Gonzáles Escalona's intricate paintings and phrases inspired by the spiritual traditions of Santería and Abakuá, whose African roots predate slavery. Rusty steampunk sculptures hung from various ledges. At the center, about 10 women churned like an engine of sound and motion — drums, dancing, singing — encircled by an audience of 100 people. Half those present were tourists — many of whom stood eerily frozen in place — while the other half were Afro-Cubans, mostly younger folks, but also families and couples, who sang along, bobbed shoulders and waists and at times even dove inside to perform.*

AT ONE POINT, an old man in an aquamarine suit announced that one of the event's founders had recently died, and so in 10 minutes everyone needed to go out to the street to pay their respects. As we exited the alleyway, a hearse drove up and parked in the middle of the road, at which point most of the tourists left. The drummers and singers resumed playing, we made an oval shape around the hearse and some tossed small offerings on top of its roof, already covered in wreaths of flowers.

A young man in chic green clothes and sunglasses suddenly appeared with two woven palm fronds, and proceeded to ease them over his head and shoulders and down his side in languid swoops, and then more quickly whip them outwards and away. The heat crackled, voices and drums merged, and the hearse began to move forward in a procession that stopped traffic for several blocks. It was a vibrant, polyrhythmic, insurgently evolving Cuba that exists outside the conventional images of the Right and the Left. While this was the only unsanctioned street demonstration I witnessed during my two-month stay in Cuba, it was the spirit of moments like these that I repeatedly sought out.

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IN LATE JANUARY 2015, fueled by mass street actions for Black lives that shut down almost every bridge, highway, and commercial center in New York City, I traveled to Cuba with my partner to learn where its own revolution stood. My partner led her college's Cuban academic exchange program, while I studied the country's system of popular education and researched a 1930 visit to the island by the Spanish writer Federico García Lorca. About a month beforehand, the United States and Cuba had announced they would re-establish diplomatic and economic relations for the first time in more than half a century.

The impressions that Cubans craft for tourists who visit the island for a week or two represent a familiar Cubanidad: mid-century automobiles, cigars, rum, rice and beans, revolutionary billboards, endless Che and Fidel souvenirs. If visitors go via a Cuban state-sponsored "educational tour," their destinations are carefully vetted to ensure a favorable trip that features little interaction with the majority of Cubans who are not involved in the tourist economy. My intention was quite different. I came to assess how left-of-state Cuban activists — especially queer, trans\* and feminist Afro-Cubans of various radical stripes build inde-

ists, popular educators, multilingual translators and a sizeable crew of South African students who are studying medicine for free in Cuba.

While the government keeps a wary eye on religious institutions and practices, Santería customs are woven into daily life — people lay out such offerings as stones, flowers, food, liquors and headless chickens at the base of ceiba and banyan trees, and wrapped candies are scattered at street intersections for the child orisha Elegguá. Men and women Santería initiates wear all white. Music and politics are infused with multiple layers of cosmological empowerment, and people regularly refer to orishas in their interpretations of events and decisions. Meanwhile, male revolutionary heroes — foremost Fidel and Che — are ubiquitously present in statues, billboards, murals, tourist wares, bookstall selections and street and plaza names. Monuments can also be found around Havana honoring fallen Irish hunger strikers, Ethel and Julius Rosenberg, Ho Chi Minh, Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, while a general awareness of past Third World liberation movements resides on the surface of the cityscape.

Since the mid-1990s Cuba has had two currencies, the regular Cuban peso and the Cuban convertible peso (CUC), which is pegged to the dollar and worth 25 times as much as the local currency. A meal that costs 5 CUC may be affordable for tourists and Cubans who receive remittances from relatives abroad, but it is a sizeable chunk of a working-class Cuban's 20-30CUC monthly salary, which is supplemented by ration books. The scarcity of basic items is an intractable reality. For instance, potatoes had been absent for several weeks, and thousands of people lined up around the city to buy them upon their return. Internet access is very limited, slow and expensive, so information is exchanged mostly by word of mouth, phone, radio and TV. An off-line data-sharing system via

pendent social power from below that critiques the government while furthering the 1959 revolution's directions.

During my first few weeks in Havana, I became immersed in the whirlwind of cultural activities: dozens of museums, cultural and historical centers, festivals, park shenanigans, movie theaters, underground events shared by word-of-mouth. At Casa de las Americas, Havana's premier cultural center, rooms were packed with people listening to discussions on a wide variety of topics.

At an evening LGBT-of-color poetry slam and party hosted by Proyecto Arcoiris, an anti-capitalist queer collective, I met cultural activists, popular educators, multilingual translators and a sizeable crew of South African students who are studying medicine for free in Cuba.

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**QUEER VOICES**

Organizing from below and to the left of the state is not easy in present-day Cuba. However, some young people are doing it, including a couple of LGBT activists who shared their thoughts with *The Independent*.

BY ISBEL DÍAZ TORRES

*Developing activism on behalf of LGBT people from an anti-capitalist stance has been the biggest challenge of my work within the Arcoiris (Rainbow) project. In an extremely depoliticized society whose members are disillusioned by the failings of a top-down socialism based on the Soviet model, and now focused on their desire for irrational consumption, it is very difficult to promote alternative thinking. Proclaiming ourselves anti-capitalist sounds old-fashioned here in Cuba in 2015. Furthermore, to attempt independent work for the rights of LGBT people, where state institutions have developed a certain hegemony, is also a challenge to our*

hard drives and thumb drives, the *paquete*, circulates most media on the island.

• • •

IN MID-FEBRUARY, the Feria Internacional del Libro (International Book Fair) animated the city for a week and a half. Mainly situated at the Cabaña — an old colonial military outpost that used to house prisoners under both Batista and Fidel — the fair gathered thousands of participants. In a country with an almost 100 percent literacy rate achieved through a post-revolution campaign that brought waves of young teachers from cities into rural areas across the island, books and popular education are considered as crucial as bread. Therefore, book publishing is a big deal in Cuba, although book circulation is a different story — some titles are intentionally under-printed because of "ideological concerns." Leonardo Padura's *El hombre que amaba a los perros* (*The Man Who Loved Dogs*), an epic novel about the life and assassination of Leon Trotsky, was conspicuously difficult to find soon after its 2012 publication. Even so, people buy multiple copies at book launches for fear of small print runs — or, perhaps, with the hope of reselling them later at higher prices — and seek certain tomes like holy grails.

• • •

ALMOST A MONTH INTO MY STAY, I became more attuned to Habana's various *armarios* (closets), which is tricky because youth culture initially appears to be super queer — snug, colorful, punk witchy clothing, fluid presentations of sexualities and genders, with well-known Cuban films like *Fresa y Chocolate* (*Strawberry and Chocolate*) from 1993 and this year's *Vestido de Novia* (*Wedding Dress*) animating public dialogue. The National Center for Sex Education, led by Mariela Castro, daughter of President Raul Castro, focuses on LGBT issues and implicitly aims to redress the past wrongdoings of homosexual "re-education" camps that briefly appeared in the Revolution's early days. Yet, queer Cuban activists of color who engage with U.S. scholarship and movements are occasionally derided for sympathizing with "Yankee"

*creativity and desire for autonomy.*

*I view the rapprochement between the governments of Cuba and the United States with great suspicion. The current change in the diplomatic arena is, among other things, the United States rewarding the Cuban government for its uncritical integration into the world order, revealing the similarity of interests between the two countries and their elites. I hope that this abandonment of utopia, now explicit, will at least serve to reunify Cuban families, the true victims of this conflict between states, and that people and truly anti-capitalist groups in Cuba and the United States can build stronger links for the fight against authoritarianism of all kinds.*

Isbel Díaz Torres is a member of Arcoiris, a queer anti-capitalist collective, and Observatorio Crítico, a network of autonomous anti-capitalists who coordinate various projects for nonviolence, antiracism, LGBT rights, indigenous and Black heritage recovery,

analyses, resulting in a kind of self-imposed "embargo of the mind."

Many queer Havanans are still discreet — strategically self-protective — about their lives. LGBT parties are announced by word of mouth and guerrilla flyering, while some lovers maintain secret relationships by not publicly acknowledging each other on the street or by referring to each other as "cousins." Exchanges of nuanced glances texture the famed Malecón shoreline, public transportation and food markets. Meanwhile, language play enacts the in-between "e" instead of the feminine "a" or masculine "o" to defamiliarize and reassign gendered words (*amiges, novies, Habaneres, compañeres*), and loving self-selected nicknames like *pajaritas* for gay men, *transformades* and *curioses* replace the once-ubiquitous catch-all slur *maricón*.

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CUBA IS UNDERGOING a lively, hotly contested public debate about race and racism, with an intricate cultural tapestry that interweaves African, Spanish and Taino histories, as well as Chinese, English, Irish and Welsh encounters. On March 21, UNESCO's International Day Against Racial Discrimination, a wide array of cultural centers, mainstream TV shows and community groups drew public attention to what is always under the surface of daily life. While the Jim Crow-style racism that existed before the Revolution has been officially abolished, schools, neighborhoods and municipal resources are separate and unequal. Black Cubans make up 34 to 68 percent of the country's population (based on divergent ways that Cubans identify their heritages), but are 75 percent of the prison population, according to the Afro-Cuban advocacy group Cofradía de la Negritud. There exist no racial discrimination laws, affirmative action policies or "diversity" scholarships because racism is said to no longer exist. U.S. writings in English on colorblind racism are not yet translated for Cubans to consider how we confront discursive silencing. At the same time, left-of-state Afro-Cuban critiques on the limits of "inclusion" and quota policies offer useful lessons for U.S. racial justice movements to measure how institutionalized solutions can

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*I would love for relations between Cuba and the United States to take place in an atmosphere of respect primarily for the self-determination of Cubans. Also I have the hope that our people don't see the "arrival of the Americans," as we say here, as the solution to our internal problems and run toward the neoliberal policies proposed to poor countries by the United States. If they do, they might not understand the serious risks involved in negotiating with the United States under "Yanqui" terms. However, I feel it will be difficult anyway, since hunger and apathy can be incredible allies in attracting American investors. I very much hope that we can maintain our autonomy in these relations in the long term.*

Logbona Olukonee is a Cuban history professor and a queer feminist activist.



YU PONG/FILICKR



JAUME ESCOFFER/FILICKR



JORGE LUIS BARRIO

**STREET CHATTER:** Cuban youths hang out at El Callejon de Hamel in central Havana.

**WHERE IT'S STILL 1959:** Some classic Detroit steel drives by a mural extolling early heroes of the Cuban Revolution, including Che Guevara (center) and Camilo Cienfuegos (right).

**FOR TOLERANCE:** LGBT activists participate in a march against homophobia backed by the Cuban government. The Cuban state has strongly embraced gay rights in the past decade but remains leery of LGBT groups that act autonomously of it.



## TENANTS

Continued from page 5

“completely insane.”

“It’s business as usual continued,” she said. “We saw the public members vote together for really unwarranted increases.”

“Owners have been overcompensated, based on actual income and expense numbers, for the past 25 years,” Harvey Epstein, the board’s other tenant representative, said earlier, in arguing for a rent rollback. He rattled off a string of statistics. Board figures show landlords’ net operating income went up 3.4 percent last year, the ninth year in a row it increased, and it’s risen by 34 percent in the last 20 years. “Not one property owner has applied for a hardship increase,” he said.

Meanwhile, he continued, tenants’ median rent burden was the highest ever recorded, at 33.8 percent of income, according to the Census Bureau’s Housing and Vacancy Survey from last year. That means that more than half of New York City’s rent-stabilized tenants are spending more than one-third of their income on rent. There are 60,000 people living in homeless shelters, a post-Depression record, and 23,000 households were evicted last year. The ultimate issue, he said, is “who is this New York going to be for?”

Mayor de Blasio based much of his 2013 campaign on that question, and tenant advocates believed that the RGB would be willing to at least freeze rents once the new mayor had replaced all the Bloomberg holdovers on it. That so far hasn’t happened. Why? Helen Schaub, a new public member many tenant advocates expected to be strongly sympathetic because of her affiliation with Local 1199SEIU — the health care workers union that has put its organizational muscle behind the campaign to strengthen the state’s rent laws before they expire in June — said she wouldn’t comment. “Real estate has a lot of money, a lot of pressure,” Garcia said. “I don’t think [the vote] was based on the data at all.”

The mayor may have won election with the votes of New Yorkers irate and frustrated that “the rent is too damn high,” but he would also like to govern without having to fight the wrath of the city’s power elite, and his plans to build 80,000 new units of “affordable” housing depend on the real-estate industry building enough luxury apartments for the city to negotiate or mandate that lower-cost units trickle down.

This article originally appeared in Tenant/Inquilino.

## CUBA

Continued from page 12

absorb and neutralize political demands for much deeper changes.

The government-sponsored Cuban press paid close attention to the Ferguson uprising and our nationwide actions against police brutality, but only to decry injustice in the U.S., not to make parallels with racially motivated stop-and-frisks, incarceration and repression in Cuba. Only a few comparative writings appeared, such as Roberto Zurbano’s call for internationalist antiracism in “Contra Ferguson.” Meanwhile, even though the Cuban government unequivocally supports the Palestinian struggle, Afro-Cubans who move from the eastern part of the island — what used to be called *El Oriente* — to Havana are derogatorily referred to as “Palestinos” because they’ve relocated with few resources, families in need and cultural modes intact. Moreover, the long history between Cuba and such Black and brown radicals as Amiri Baraka, Stokely Carmichael, C.L.R. James, Betita Martinez, Angela Davis, Assata Shakur, Alice Walker and Robert F. Williams has long served internationally as a screen for the government’s treatment of Afro-Cubans on the island.

Since the Cuban Revolution swept to power in 1959 — a major anti-colonial victory by students, urban clandestine supporters (many of them young women) and guerrilla fighters via boat and mountain who all overthrew a U.S.-backed dictatorship — it has been deeply bruised by the boot of the U.S. embargo; the fall of the Soviet Union, which provided billions of dollars per year in aid; mass economic crises and social dislocations; and enduring racism, sexism and heterosexism. As a result, the control of a closely guarded government machine can feel as anachronistic as the faded billboards and freshly painted murals extolling its virtues. However, Cubans do have access to free and excellent health care and education, as well as inexpensive food, housing, public transit and telephones. Cuba’s past support for Third World liberation struggles and its present-day policy

of sending legions of its medical professionals to serve in some of the poorest corners of the planet have helped to forge deep relationships with African, Caribbean and Latin American nations for which Cuba is still a beacon of hope.

Meanwhile, a still-evolving revolution from below has been nurtured by relationships between people hustling by all means necessary to survive and thrive — word of mouth about where to find this or that item, sudden delight in a chance meeting on the street, delicious meals from few ingredients, rumba dance parties with ecstatic children, hushed lucid dialogues, metaphor-laden songs about how to make changes in “*mi casa*.” Still, left-of-state activists in such groups as Observatorio Critico, Proyecto Arcoiris and Motivitos confront a reality in which organizing a protest about anything without govern-

mental approval — planting trees for environmental justice, cleaning up the Malecón shoreline, holding a kiss-in or otherwise independently creating solutions — can garner years in prison, which keeps these activists isolated from the general population. Nevertheless, it’s inspiring to see necessity bring together anarchists and Trotskyists inside/against/beyond a Stalinist-oriented Caribbean state. Informal dialogues between these small but vibrant networks weave together concrete responses to concrete realities, and in doing so they have taken on a life independent of familiar political discourses.

Conor Tomás Reed has been a student, teacher, archivist and activist in the City University of New York since 2006, a co-founding member of the Free University of New York City since 2012 and on the research council of *Lost and Found: A CUNY Poetics Document Initiative* since 2013. Michele Hardesty contributed to this article.

## LESSONS LEARNED

BY CONOR TOMÁS REED

*Upon returning to New York City and becoming immersed in a new round of street actions, citywide campaigns and popular education events, I’ve been reflecting on how interactions across revolutionary traditions can be further developed in New York City, and with Cuba. In the process, endless squabbles between radicals up north can be converted into more amply utilizing our organizing liberties. I recognize that my critical views are from only two months of experiences in Cuba, and that they could easily be subsumed within a much larger momentum of critiques that intend to overturn the revolutionary achievements that have been made in Cuba. I also worry about how “normalization between Cuba and the United States” may be manipulated in already imbalanced negotiations under the shadow of a shared colonial history, as small autonomous Cuban movements struggle to assert their own visions and demands. I hope we can push beyond “normal” to something much more humanizing and revolutionary. In this process, here are some lasting lessons I’ve nurtured back here at home:*

- In-person extended dialogues, preferably with food and drinks, create more clarity and trust than words on a page or screen. Social change is neither solely linguistics nor a hasty sprint.
- More often than not we inhabit multilingual spaces — exercise this strength or it will wither.
- Quantity is not quality. Organizing 30 actions in 30 days doesn’t necessarily bring more people into movement(s), map strategic escalations, intersect struggles or build long-term sustainable power

across communities. Our imaginative horizon should never be the end of the month, let alone the end of the action.

- The digital divide is a real local/transnational issue. Don’t equate political commitment with up-to-date knowledge or Facebook post counts when for some it takes a day to download an article and for others news is instantaneous. Keep this in mind when making website platforms, data-heavy action announcements and complicated networks.
- Beware the seduction of state power from above. Those who marvel at the possibilities of Greece’s Syriza and Spain’s Podemos should consider how leftist movements that won state power in Chile, Congo, Cuba, Ghana, Nicaragua, South Africa, Angola, Mozambique, Vietnam, Zimbabwe and many other countries struggled to realize their goals in the face of opposition from U.S.-led imperialism, were brutally ousted from power or slowly ossified into a version their earlier revolutionary selves would have abhorred. Movements that feature electoral or state-from-above seizure strategies will always come up against these contradictions. The master’s tools will not dismantle the master’s house, nor is the master’s house where we should demand to reside.



# RESISTING GENTRIFICATION AT GUNPOINT

By LISA TAYLOR

BUENAVENTURA, COLUMBIA — A gentle breeze wafts through the wooden stilt house rocked by the ocean's waves in the seaside neighborhood of Puente Nayero, providing a welcome respite from the stifling Pacific Coast heat. Children's shouts and laughter and popular salsa music filter in through the door as Miguel Caicedo,\* an Afro-Colombian community leader and small-scale fisherman, demonstrates the fishing techniques he has been practicing for 47 years and reflects on the changes he has seen in his community.

Leaving for eight to 10 days at a time in a small boat, groups of fishermen — usually composed of several family members — journey up to 90 miles along the coast to catch at least the ton of fish needed to make a living. The route has progressively grown longer as nearby fish have become scarce. Demonstrating the use of a specific fishing hook while easily reciting at least 10 different species of fish and seafood, Caicedo takes pride in his community's fishing tradition.

"For us, small-scale fishing is incredibly important to sustain ourselves," he affirms.

But dwindling fish populations are not the only threat to Caicedo's livelihood. The port city of Buenaventura, of which Puente Nayero is a part, has become infamous for extreme rates of disappearance, assassination, displacement and dismemberment carried out by paramilitary groups vying for control of lucrative drug smuggling routes that extend north to Central America and ultimately the United States. Buenaventura's strategic location as Colombia's largest port, as well as its network of rivers and estuaries, has made it sought after by both illicit and licit business interests. Such interests have disproportionately affected the city's Afro-Colombian communities: the descendants of Africans enslaved by the Spanish crown who settled in the Pacific region and today make up nearly 90 percent of Buenaventura's half-million-person population.

Despite the special deployment of thousands of military troops to the city by Colombian president Juan Manuel Santos in 2014, residents argue that the militarization of the city and the presence of state security forces have had little effect. Witnessing police inaction as well as some cases of abuse — one Puente Nayero youth was tortured with electric shocks by police in June 2014 — local residents suspect indifference and even collusion of state security forces with paramilitary groups.

In addition to paramilitary control of his neighborhood, Caicedo also has to contend with Buenaventura port expansion projects that push out small-scale fishing operations. Despite being approached last year by three paramilitaries who threatened to assassinate him, he remains firm in his support of the year-old nonviolent initiative in his community known as the Puente Nayero Humanitarian Space. Made up of one street and two adjoining bridges lined with houses built over the ocean, Puente Nayero is a residential community of approximately 300 families. Caicedo insists that the Humanitarian Space — an area free of illegal armed actors — is a crucial tool for defending Puente Nayero's families, physical territory, ancestral fishing livelihood and cultural practices.

"I'm threatened here, but I put up with these

threats in order to defend my territory. I am a founder of this process," says Caicedo.

In the face of so much violence, why did Puente Nayero decide to form a Humanitarian Space and resist nonviolently? Living in constant fear and anxiety, community members decided to take action in the wake of two events that happened in their neighborhood. One was the brutal murder of seafood vendor Marisol Rodríguez, who was assassinated in March 2014 for protesting the disappearance of her husband and son. Paramilitaries brought her to a "chop-up house" — the name given to houses used to dismember victims — and began to torture her. Bleeding, she escaped from her attackers and fell into the ocean, where the men pursued her, tied rocks to her body and drowned her. This event was followed one month later by the assassination of 16-year-old Carlos Angarita. After finishing a day of work selling coconut water, Angarita was dismembered by paramilitaries. Community members discovered his body the next morning less than 50 yards from Puente Nayero.

Witnessing such bloodshed so close to their homes, community members made the decision to create the Humanitarian Space in April of last year. They formed a leadership committee and petitioned for help from the Interchurch Commission for Justice and Peace, a Colombian NGO that documents and defends human rights. They also became the first urban area to join CONPAZ, a network of 120 communities in Colombia that strive to defend their territorial, cultural and human rights from the country's many armed actors. Committing to a practice of nonviolence and aided by the presence of national and international peace observers, the residents of Puente Nayero succeeded in driving out the paramilitaries, a process that has been fraught with constant death threats over the last year.

"The Humanitarian Space was formed," said one resident, "because there was too much violence and the community began to reflect. We did not want to remain quiet."

Although the Humanitarian Space is geographically a very small area of Buenaventura, perhaps the equivalent of two square blocks, Puente Nayero community members hope that their grassroots initiative will continue to grow and expand to neighboring communities. In fact, residents on the neighboring street of Punta Icaco have recently began organizing to create their own Humanitarian Space, indicating the growth of a grassroots initiative that seeks to build long-term security in Buenaventura street by street, neighborhood by neighborhood.

## CORPORATE MAKEOVER

Community leaders argue that relentless paramilitary presence indicates a larger, more insidious phenomenon: the corporate and tourist makeover of Buenaventura that relies on violent actors to effect mass displacements of Afro-Colombian communities living in oceanfront or otherwise strategic areas, freeing up that land for port expansion and "development" projects, a strategy tacitly supported by the Colombian state eager to boost foreign investment, trade and tourism. As implementation of these projects moves forward, the construction of expensive hotels, business centers and port infrastructure steadily pushes out Afro-Colombian communities,

signaling the growing social and geographical gentrification of the city.

The port of Buenaventura currently moves more than 600,000 shipping containers each year, representing approximately 60 percent of Colombia's imports and exports. Various port expansion projects endorsed by the Colombian government will require the displacement — whether voluntary or involuntary — of communities in Buenaventura. These projects will almost exclusively benefit the estimated 12 owners of Buenaventura's port business, further increasing inequality in a city with a 90 percent poverty rate.

As the Colombian government continues to implement neoliberal economic policies, signing on to agreements such as the U.S.-Colombia Free Trade Agreement, the Pacific Alliance regional free trade bloc, and free trade agreements with the European Union, Israel and South Korea, communities have noticed increased presence of armed actors, especially paramilitaries, in strategic territories for foreign investment. Various cases of alleged links between paramilitaries and multinational corporations have been documented in other areas of Colombia as well, with well-known examples involving companies such as Chiquita Brands International, Coca-Cola and Nestle.

In the case of Puente Nayero, the construction of an oceanfront boardwalk tourist project has been most directly responsible for displacement.

"It is the Bahía de la Cruz Boardwalk [project] that wants to kick us out, to exterminate the communities that are here, mostly in the oceanfront neighborhoods," affirmed Puente Nayero leader Nhora Isabel Castillo. "Ever since they began to plan the boardwalk, we've seen violence in Buenaventura like never before. ... That's why we feel there's a connection between the violence and the projects."

Castillo added that the proposed relocation of the families of Puente Nayero to the inland neighborhood of San Antonio will bring about the cultural and economic demise of the community, as San Antonio has no access to the ocean and 60 percent of the Afro-Colombian families in Puente Nayero, including Miguel Caicedo's family, survive through small-scale fishing.

"Without this process [the Humanitarian Space], our street would have been abandoned because of the violence," says Caicedo, affirming his hope that continued organizing will help his community defend itself — rejecting paramilitary control and the corporate makeover of Buenaventura that it heralds.

*Lisa Taylor is a member of the Witness for Peace Colombia Team. This article is adapted from a version that appeared on [upsidedownworld.org](http://upsidedownworld.org).*

\*NAME HAS BEEN CHANGED TO PROTECT THE IDENTITY OF THE INDIVIDUAL.



**OVER TROUBLED WATERS:** A wooden stilt house in the violence-torn city of Buenaventura, Colombia.

LOJAYAS/IT





## WHEN A PEEPING TOM MAKES ART

Arne Svenson: *The Workers*  
JULIE SAUL GALLERY  
THROUGH MAY 30

By Mike Newton

In photographer Arne Svenson's 2011 series "The Neighbors," people lounge around, sit in repose or otherwise find moments of simple ease: lying on a couch, say, or sprawling against a plate-glass window. The images are spare and restrained, made with a sense of stillness and quiet. These images — placid as they are — made a big clatter when they were first exhibited in 2013. Svenson made "The Neighbors" by secretly photographing his neighbors across the street in Tribeca's Zinc Building, one of those new, glass-and-steel citadels with high ceilings, high rents and — of course — nice, big windows.

Unsurprisingly, a pair of the neighbors sued. The courts twice upheld Svenson's right to display the images, even while calling his conduct "invasive" and "disturbing" in the most recent decision, handed down in April. The *New York Post* was arguably more blunt, denouncing him as "creepy." But what's interesting is what Svenson did not do — he didn't install spy cameras in the hallway, for example, or hack someone's laptop camera. He simply shot what he could see from the perfectly-legal vantage point of his own apartment, albeit with the aid of a powerful telephoto lens.

Svenson's new series "The Workers," on view at the Julie Saul Gallery, functions as a sort of sequel to "The Neighbors." As in "The Neighbors," the people appear more as sociological types than as individuals — their faces tend to be turned away, partially obscured or out of the frame entirely, keeping their personal identities hidden. Both series involve subjects unknowingly photographed in shiny New York buildings, but the focus of "The Workers" is on construction workers rather than hapless apartment-dwellers. Like "The Neighbors,"

it has a neo-classical vibe, with dirty window glass giving these freshly printed images an aged, dappled patina. "The Workers" doesn't carry the same voyeuristic thrill as "The Neighbors" — construction workers, it is understood, spend much of their time in public view.

Notably, while the concept of "home" brings with it connotations of privacy and security, for these workers, the home they're laboring on is not their own. In this light, "The Workers" becomes a commentary on the transitory or unstable lives that so many manual laborers are forced to lead.

But then, in 2015, does this idea of home as a safe, private place really hold up? Love them or hate them, Svenson's photos make for a tasty and relatively low-tech interrogation of the concerns Americans face in this post-Snowden age. The subjects of "The Neighbors" were in their homes, sure, but more and more, it seems naïve to assume that "home" is private, just like it'd be silly to assume that a "private" email is private.

An emergent common wisdom tells us that virtually all information online — even the so-called private stuff — should be considered more or less public, that if you really want your information to stay private, well, you'd better keep it off the internet or dedicate your life to learning about encryption technology. Or, even better, don't put anything personal on any internet-enabled device whatsoever. In this context, privacy starts to seem like an oil painting or a quill pen: a decadent luxury from a pre-digital time.

Svenson's compositions have an old-world allure, but they're very much products of the present day, reflecting this new American reality. On June 1, Section 215 of the USA PATRIOT Act — the section that, in the Obama administration's view, grants massive powers to the NSA — is set to be renewed, and as *The Independent* goes to press, Congress is debating ways to limit this seemingly unbridled gov-

ernment surveillance. But even if the government curtails its surveillance powers, the possibility of it will still hang over every online interaction for what may be a long time to come. Like the ever-shinier New York, the landscape of the Internet has been deeply changed. New homes keep being built, but it's becoming increasingly clear that we can never go home again.



Arne Svenson,  
*Workers #10*  
©2014

Arne Svenson,  
*Workers #9*  
©2014

Arne Svenson,  
*Neighbors #11*  
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All images  
courtesy  
Julie Saul Gallery



# HOW THE TSARNAEV BROTHERS BECAME THE BOSTON MARATHON BOMBERS

*The Brothers: The Road to an American Tragedy*  
BY MASHA GESSEN  
RIVERHEAD BOOKS, 2015

By Maria Vassileva

This winter, just months before *The Brothers: The Road to an American Tragedy* was released, Russian-American journalist Masha Gessen published several dispatches from the jury selection process for the Dzhokhar Tsarnaev trial in Boston. As an elaborate questionnaire helped both the defense and the prosecution dismiss juror after potential juror, Gessen observed how difficult it was for the justice system to fulfill its promise that Tsarnaev, who with his brother Tamerlan detonated two bombs at the 2013 Boston Marathon, killing three and injuring at least 264, would be tried by a jury of his peers. What would such a jury look like? Do we even know enough about Dzhokhar Tsarnaev to be able to imagine it?

*The Brothers* looks at the ways 21-year-old Tsarnaev and his family never quite fit in: They were Chechen, but had never lived in Chechnya; the family spoke Russian, but could not assimilate into Boston's large Russian-speaking community; they were Muslim in two countries, Russia and the United States, where their religion is a source of military conflicts. Dzhokhar seemed to be no different from his American friends, though he changed the spelling of his name to Jahar to make it easier for them to pronounce and they never learned much about his background or family. His older brother Tamerlan was too foreign to compete in U.S. wrestling tournaments that only citizens could enter, too American for the friends he made when he traveled to Dagestan, the Russian republic that had been the family's last home before they moved to Massachusetts. Gessen navigates the mix of the very American and very foreign in the Tsarnaevs' story with skill, explaining cultural differences without mystifying them or using them as shorthand for character. She understands that immigrants have to refigure their identities on the go in their new lives, and one of the book's many strengths is its focus on the emotional upheaval that comes with moving to a new country and learning its unspoken rules — an experience common to the many immigrants whose stories intersect with those of Dzhokhar and Tamerlan.

Unlike other journalists, who limited their coverage to the American half of the Tsarnaevs' lives, Gessen follows the family across the map. The book includes a short history of the Chechen nation, which is often left out of Russia-centric accounts of that region's violent past. Here, *The Brothers* overlaps with Gessen's book on Vladimir Putin, *The Man Without a Face*, in which she outlines how Chechens are perceived — and presented — as a threat that requires the president's firm hand and constant military presence in the North Caucasus. The trauma of the Chechen wars has shaped the experience of both expats and people still living in the region, and the Tsarnaevs' story is one of its unexpected aftershocks.

*The Brothers* begins with a disclaimer of sorts: "This book, however, is not about that pain [of those who suf-

fered loss and trauma because of the bombings]. It is about something that, whatever evidence is unearthed, will never be entirely certain: it is about the tragedy that preceded the bombing, the reasons that led to it, and its invisible victims." The invisible victims are named: Ibragim Todashev, a

friend of Tamerlan who was killed during an interrogation by the FBI; Dzhokhar's friends Robel Phillipos, Dias Kadyrbayev and Azamat Tazhayakov, young men who face decades in prison because their bad, uninformed decisions amounted to obstructing the investigation; and the members of the Chechen community who were immediately seen as suspect by association.

These stories serve as evidence for Gessen's larger arguments about the inadequate and harmful methods of the ill-defined "war on terror," which is quick to equate being a Muslim with being a threat and treats families and support systems as if they were made up of potential accomplices. Gessen cites terrorism scholars who reject the FBI's assumptions that terrorism is the end stage of a gradual process of radicalization, a theory that has shaped policy and media coverage of terrorist acts. Specialists agree that most people who hold radical views do not commit violence, and that most terrorists are otherwise "normal" people — the Tsarnaevs fit this profile, and there is no evidence that they were "radicalized" by a close friend or a large terrorist network. The FBI's idea of terrorism does not explain what happened to the Tsarnaev brothers or what they did, and the bureau's investigation wrought havoc on innocent families and communities in its pursuit of a radicalized network. Gessen's own investigation ends with a conclusion that inverts the logic of the FBI radicalization theory: "The people in key roles in this story are few, the ideas they hold are uncomplicated, and the plans they conjure are anything but far reaching. It was the hardest and most frightening kind of story to believe."

Gessen's previous two books were remarkable for their smooth translations of events in contemporary Russia — Putin's rise to power and the efforts of his opposition, and the trial and imprisonment of the members of dissident punk band Pussy Riot — that provided the context necessary for a wider audience not fluent in the language of these news items. *The Brothers* follows in their lineage. The book ends before Tsarnaev's trial began; the jury has since found him guilty on all 30 counts stemming from the bombings and chose the death sentence over life in prison as his punishment. It is all but certain that his lawyers will appeal, and while the story spins to account for Tsarnaev's Americanness or otherness and his relatives comment on the Boston trial from Dagestan or Kazakhstan, Gessen fills in the missing links and explains what it is like to know, or come from, all of these places at the same time.



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## REVOLUTION FROM BEHIND THE WALLS

*Captive Nation: Black Prison Organizing in the Civil Rights Era*

By DAN BERGER

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA PRESS, 2014

By Matt Wasserman

With over 2 million people in jail and prison and nearly 5 million more under some form of criminal justice supervision, the United States has been called the world's first prison society. While the majority of Americans may never be locked up, the “peculiar institution” of the prison — and the attendant collateral consequences of conviction, such as the loss of access to public housing, ineligibility for student loans, difficulties finding employment and deportation — have come to structure social relations, much as slavery did in the antebellum South. Prisons have become central sites in reproducing and reinforcing the contemporary racial hierarchy and domination that civil rights advocate Michelle Alexander calls the “new Jim Crow.”

The #blacklivesmatter movement has focused its still-inchoate energies on the racialized presumptions of guilt and dangerousness that have played a central role in the endemic police violence against communities of color. This violence recently manifested in the killings of Eric Garner, Michael Brown and Walter Scott, among others, although the problem goes back to the days of slave patrols. Protesters have largely focused their energies on creating a narrative in which these men are viewed as victims rather than predators or perps. But left out of the picture have been those prisoners sentenced to a living death in the nation's penitentiaries, out of sight and seemingly out of mind. This is understandable, if unfortunate. Given the massive dragnet operated by the police in poor communities of color, criminal suspects are a far larger and more sympathetic group than prisoners. Many people have been pulled over for a traffic infraction and been stopped and frisked or arrested; in comparison, relatively few people have served hard time.

*Captive Nation* captivately chronicles a moment when prisoners played a central role in the black radical imaginary. Historian Dan Berger starts the story with the civil rights

movement, when going to jail became a central rite of passage for those agitating for freedom. From the revival of slavery under another name with convict leasing to the massive arrests of protesters, jails and prisons served as citadels of white supremacy in the Jim Crow South. Martin Luther King Jr.'s “Letter from Birmingham Jail” exemplifies how a stint in jail lost its stigmatizing power and in fact became a badge of moral courage.

The heart of Berger's story, however, is the role that black convicts played in organizing and inspiring the Black Power movement. Prisoners played a leading role in 1960s organizations such as the Black Panthers, whose references to “brothers on the block” encompassed the cellblock as well as the corner.

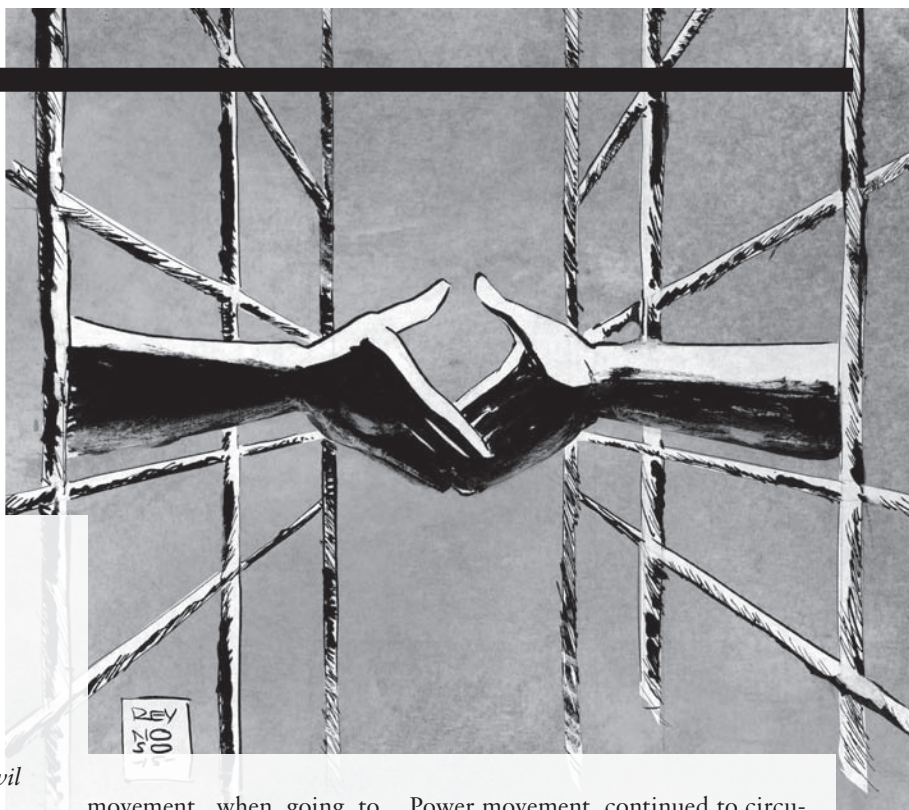
Black prisoners played a powerful role in building a critique of “AmeriKKa,” articulating the continuity from slavery to the present day on the one hand and a continuum between the maximum-security confinement of prison and the “minimum-security” confinement of black ghettos on the other. With few outlets for their time, inmates who often came to prison illiterate became autodidactic intellectuals, feverishly studying the roots of their oppression and discussing radical ideas and literature. Indeed, the black nationalist impulse found few adherents as loyal as those serving time, who managed to spread this ideology in radical newspapers despite being locked up.

Radical prisoners carved out a prominent position in the Black Power movement, laying claim to a vanguard role by dint of their position as the wretched of the earth. Eldridge Cleaver, the Panthers' Minister of Information, wrote his best-known book, *Soul on Ice*, while in Folsom State Prison. And George Jackson became a leading figure in the Panthers while serving a sentence of one year to life — intended to symbolize California's commitment to the rehabilitative ideal, in practice such “indeterminate” sentences meant that obeisance was the price of release. While Jackson was killed in San Quentin during an alleged escape attempt in 1971, this only burnished his name: *Soledad Brother*, a collection of letters he wrote from the prison of the same name and a key text of the Black

Power movement, continued to circulate widely. On the other side of the country, the short-lived rebellion of inmates at New York's Attica Prison against the conditions of their confinement was an inspiration to other prisoners as well as movement militants on the outside.

The story has a tragic coda. As Black Power groups on the outside fell prey to organizational splits, power struggles and predatory behavior, so did those on the inside. The Black Guerilla Family, for example, which was formed as a black nationalist prison outfit by veterans of the Panthers, is now more of a prison gang with ideological trappings. And as organizations crumbled, there was a revanchist backlash. Instead of responding to prison unrest with improved conditions, prison systems revived solitary confinement, abandoned rehabilitation as a goal and built new supermax prisons. Prisoners vanished from the national conversation even as incarceration rates soared.

*Captive Nation* reminds us of the oft-observed role of those who were literally in the belly of the beast in fighting for freedom during the 1960s and '70s. The exclusion of prisoners from the public eye since then likely has to do with their role as a sort of bogeyman in the politics of fear and retribution — or “law and order” — that have been dominant since Nixon started bloviating about the “silent majority.” But there now appears to be an opening for a new kind of conversation around criminal justice reform. There is an emerging consensus that mass incarceration is untenable — riddled with racial disparities, unnecessarily punitive and far too expensive. It is telling that while Bill Clinton interrupted his presidential campaign in 1992 to preside over the execution of an intellectually disabled prisoner, candidate Hillary Clinton recently gave a speech about the need to end mass incarceration. *Captive Nation* is a powerful reminder of how compelling the voices of those most affected by the prison-industrial complex can be in making the radical case for mass decarceration.



FRANKREYNOSO.COM



## HERMAN'S HOUSE

#76759: Featuring the House That Herman Built  
BROOKLYN PUBLIC LIBRARY, CENTRAL BRANCH  
THROUGH JUNE 5

By Michael Steven Smith

**Y**ou walk through the main door of the Brooklyn Public Library's Central Branch and it hits you: a jail cell. It is a full-scale reconstruction of Herman Wallace's 6-by-9-foot cell, right there in the lobby. It is part of the exhibition, "The House That Herman Built," and it gets better.

Herman Wallace spent a U.S.-record-setting 41 years in solitary confinement in that cell in the infamous Angola prison in Louisiana.

In 2003 Brooklyn-born visual artist Jackie Sumell, then an art student in California, asked Herman, a Black Panther prison activist and member of the Angola Three, "What kind of house does a man who has lived in a 6-foot-by-9-foot cell for over 30 years dream of?" Their exchange resulted in a collaboration that transformed both their lives and produced this internationally renowned exhibit, as well as a book and a documentary film.

It gets better when you walk past the jail cell to a model of the house where he wanted to live, which he designed with Jackie's help. It's lovely and open, with views of the sky, exposed spaces, vegetable and flower gardens and green trees. And showing Herman's sense of humor, it has a swimming pool with a black panther in tile at the bottom.

There are two phones attached to the cabinet displaying the model house. You can listen to Herman speaking from the prison: He tells you all about the house, taking special pride in mentioning the stand-alone guest room for his visiting friends and comrades. Listening, you really get to like him. You want to learn more about him, about what he thought and read and how he kept it together all those many years alone in a cell so confining that he says it was like being locked in a bathroom.

Herman, Albert Woodfox and Robert King were framed and charged with murdering a prison guard. Herman lived 41 years in solitary, until a brave judge reversed his sentence and ordered a new trial based on the exclusion of women from the jury. He was released and died three days later. King got out in 2001; Woodfox's conviction was overturned this February, but he is still inside pending the state's appeal.

The balcony of the library has display cases containing some of his 12-year-long correspondence with Su-

mell. She wrote and visited Herman over the years, and worked with him to realize his ideas. Getting out of prison and dying a free man was a triumph of Herman's will to live, and with Sumell's help, his dream has been realized, if only in model form thus far. Sumell is currently raising the funds to construct the house life-size in New Orleans.

Herman was self-taught, a poor kid from New Orleans's Ninth Ward. He came to understand, along with America's most famous intellectual Albert Einstein, that socialism is humanity's attempt "to overcome and advance beyond the predatory phase of human development."

On display at the library is Herman's handwritten reading list, which constitutes a real treasure to enhance our understanding of the world and how to change it. It includes, among others, the speeches of Malcolm X; Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*; *Woman's Evolution*, the great work by pioneering feminist anthropologist Evelyn Reed; and *Democracy and Revolution*, by the late philosopher and historian George Novak.

That the Brooklyn Public Library would put on this show destroys the notion that librarians are a timid lot. They took a risk promoting a "convicted cop killer," and a Black Panther no less. In doing so they distinguished themselves by taking on the racists and the promoters and apologists of mass incarceration and prolonged solitary confinement, a form of torture.

The show is being used to educate people through accompanying library programs about the 80,000 prisoners, including children, who are held in solitary confinement today in America's prisons. The confinement of 2.3 million people has put the United States in the lead throughout the world, where, although it makes up only 6 percent of the world's population, it has managed to lock up 25 percent of the world's prisoners.

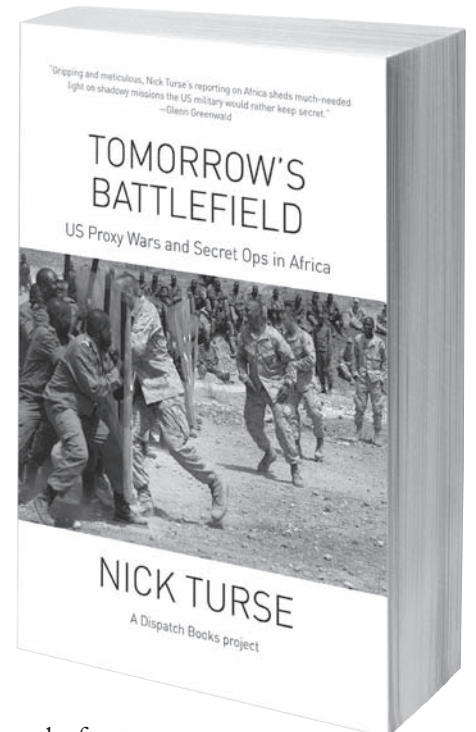
So go see this exhibition. Herman's steadfastness and spirit is contagious. It will be good for your soul. And incidentally, while you're there, check out a book or two.

*Michael Steven Smith is a New York City attorney and author. He is a co-host of the WBAI radio show "Law and Disorder" and the co-editor of Imagine: Living in a Socialist USA.*

Gripping and meticulous, Nick Turse's reporting on Africa sheds much-needed light on shadowy missions the U.S. military would rather keep secret.—Glenn Greenwald

"In the first book length account of AFRICOM's operations, Nick Turse chronicles how in a very short time, Africa went from the margins of US foreign policy to be not just the warzone of tomorrow, but of today."

—Sean Jacobs, international affairs faculty at The New School and founder of *Africa is a Country*



You won't see segments about it on the nightly news or read about it on the front page of America's newspapers, but the Pentagon is fighting a new shadow war in Africa, helping to destabilize whole countries and preparing the ground for future blowback. Behind closed doors, U.S. officers now claim that "Africa is the battlefield of tomorrow, today." In *Tomorrow's Battlefield*, award-winning journalist and bestselling author Nick Turse exposes the shocking true story of the U.S. military's spreading secret wars in Africa.

 HaymarketBooks.org



May 2015 THE INDEPENDENT

**PAIN INTO ART:**  
"Featuring the House That Herman Built" at the Brooklyn Public Library, Central Branch.



MICHAEL STEVEN SMITH







# WHAT SHOULD I DO ABOUT DADDY'S BLOOD-STAINED FORTUNE?

Major Barbara  
FIRST UNITARIAN CONGREGATIONAL SOCIETY  
THROUGH MAY 30

By David Meadow

When the play *Major Barbara* first premiered in 1905, it was a good time to be a ruling-class Briton. It was more than a decade before the British Empire would peak in size, and it seemed only to be bound for greater things. World War I had yet to mow down its unfathomable numbers of young lives. How perfect, then, for socialist gadfly and critic of militarism George Bernard Shaw to write a drama poking and prodding at the rationalizations that the establishment offered for the buildup of ever greater and more terrible armaments. In this play, Shaw pitted a weapons manufacturer, Andrew Undershaft, against Undershaft's own estranged daughter Barbara, a high-ranking missionary for the Salvation Army. The premise is that Major Barbara has a sudden opportunity to accept a huge donation to the Army from her father, but refuses it on principle, saying it's tainted with the blood of war.

Brave New World Repertory Theatre, which produces some classics and new works specifically by Brooklyn writers, has turned out a studied, thorough and well-paced production of *Major Barbara* that holds the audience from beginning to end. Working with a modest budget, they make the most of their resources and, for this project at least, create a sense of great wealth in just the right places to make a play about rich and poor convincing.

Performances are very good overall, both individually and as an ensemble. Grace Rao sparkles as the staunchly idealist title character, drawing us in with her inexhaustible compassion and compulsion, and then taking us on the roller coaster as her various assumptions get knocked down, resurrected and turned inside-out. We have to remember here how radical a departure it would be, in 1905, for an heiress of a wealthy, respectable, Anglican-establishment family to go work for the Salvation Army. If any American has a strong image of the Salvation Army as an organization, it's probably an image of stolid reactionaries. To Barbara's family, however, it is a downright subversive outfit. The way Rao plays Barbara in this context, she could absolutely be that

friend of yours who has hard-to-fathom political beliefs but projects such courage in her convictions that you always feel things will work out if you stick by her side.

Barbara's foil, her father Andrew, gets an unusual treatment from the slight, sly David Fruttkoff. The role is often played by a burly alpha male, roughly shouldering the world out of his way, but Fruttkoff manages to pull it off with aplomb as a creepily impish, insinuating cypher who looks more like Joel Grey's emcee character from *Cabaret* than J.P. Morgan. You don't even get the sense of a Napoleon complex; this captain of industry's cold, calculating intelligence insulates him from any sense of insecurity. Indeed, Fruttkoff manages to summon up a startlingly triumphant boom in his voice as he harangues his character's son in a monologue about money and politics that feels like a direct ancestor of Gordon Gekko's "You think this is a *democracy*?!" bit from *Wall Street*.

To return to the ensemble acting, this play contains many moments that require the give-and-take of quick repartee, as high ideals, expressed methodically in an often essay-like structure, mix with the occasional glib one-liner and everything in between. Generally, the older and more classic the play, the more you have to suspend your disbelief that any real person could come up with lines like these on the spot, for so long at a clip and at such speed, and *Major Barbara* is no exception. These actors, however, imbue the lines with a timeless, unforced emotion that makes you go right along with them, and no one falters in the rhythm of the exchange.

Dialect is almost as important here as it is in Shaw's *Pygmalion*, because Major Barbara has so much to say about class — about the nervous striving to maintain proprieties and keep up appearances, about the icky in-group-out-group rituals and the mutual contempt that the rich, the poor and the myriad tiers of the middle class all hold with varying degrees of openness. Smart casting choices gave the most lines to the people who could do the most convincing accents (including East London and elevated RP English as *la Pygmalion*'s Henry Higgins), so

while the accents aren't perfect, they're impressively consistent and don't detract from the rest of the play.

I won't spoil the ending for those who haven't seen it. I will say this: In less than two hours, this company forces us to confront issues that are just as present in the second Gilded Age we live in now — when it seems as if almost no publicly traded firm is more than a few degrees of separation from the war machine, and the major nonprofits and civil-society organizations have to go hat in hand to these corporations if they want to keep operating — as they were a century ago. Just as Barbara asks herself, so too must our modern nonprofits: just what strings are attached, and is it worth it?

## CONSCIENCE VS. CALCULATION:

Grace Rao sparkles as the staunchly idealistic title character in the Brave New World Repertory Theatre's production of *Major Barbara*.

## MAY-JUNE THEATER LISTINGS

### BLOOD RED ROSES: THE FEMALE PIRATE PROJECT

WRITTEN & PERFORMED BY THE ENSEMBLE  
DIRECTED BY GRETCHEN VAN LENTE

A devised immersive shadow puppetry piece examining the history of female pirates, performed on an actual boat with lots of live sea shanty singing.  
THE WATERFRONT MUSEUM  
290 Conover St at Pier 44, Bklyn  
May 11–31: Fri–Sun; doors open at 7:45pm  
performance begins at sundown  
dramaofworks.com or 866-811-4111, \$20

### PUNKS & PROVOCATEURS The Roaring Girl

WRITTEN BY THOMAS MIDDLETON & THOMAS DEKKER  
DIRECTED BY ANAIS KOIVISTO

**Punk as F\*ck**  
WRITTEN BY MICHAEL K. WHITE AND DIANNA STARK  
DIRECTED BY KATHERINE SOMMER  
Two plays in rotating repertory:  
— Punk as F\*ck, a new play with live music where youth, passion and ideals collide at a garage band's rehearsal in 1991.  
— The Roaring Girl, a Jacobean comedy following a cross-dressing, ass-kicking, whip-smart heroine as she deals with marriage, gender and fidelity, with sword fights.  
THE ACCESS THEATRE GALLERY  
380 Broadway  
June 4–July 21: Thurs–Mon at 8pm  
Sats, June 6 and 20 & Suns, June 7 and 21 at 3pm

everydayinferno.com or 347-291-1805, \$18

### THE UPPER ROOM

WRITTEN & DIRECTED BY JEREMY BLOOM AND BRIAN RADY  
MUSIC COMPOSED AND PERFORMED BY CATHERINE BROOKMAN  
Inspired by the back-to-the-land movement, a darkly humorous consideration of spirituality and the dangers of our changing environment, featuring a live mixed score, antique scuba suits and an overhead projector to create a brand-new music theater event.  
THE NEW OHIO THEATRE  
154 Christopher St  
May 22–June 12: Tues–Sat at 8pm  
radyandbloom.com, \$18

### BUTTER AND EGG MAN

WRITTEN BY GEORGE S. KAUFMAN  
DIRECTED BY RICHARD RUST  
A 1925 satire about a seemingly simple Mid-Western boy who comes to New York to break into theatrical producing with the misguided idea that he will double his money. But the young man may be smarter than he seems — will he be able to turn a "flop" in to a "wow"?  
THE GENE FRANKEL THEATRE  
24 Bond Str  
May 16–30: Wed–Sat at 8pm  
Sun, May 17 & Sat, May 30 at 2pm  
retroproductions.org, \$18

Listings provided by Robert Gonyo and the Go See a Show! independent theatre podcast, goseeshowpodcast.com.



**THROUGH JUNE 5**

Free

**EXHIBITION: #76759: FEATURING THE HOUSE THAT HERMAN BUILT.** Herman Wallace was a Black Panther activist and member of the Angola Three who spent more than four decades in solitary confinement. In 2013, three days after his release from prison, he died in his sleep. A collaboration between Wallace and artist Jackie Sumell has resulted in this exhibition of a life-size replica of his cell, his belongings, and a model of the dream house Wallace designed while in confinement. Brooklyn Public Library, Central Branch 10 Grand Army Plaza, Bklyn [bklynlibrary.org](http://bklynlibrary.org) • 718-230-2100

**SAT MAY 23**

10am–2pm • \$20–\$80 suggested donation  
**WALKING TOUR: THE MANHATTANIZATION OF BROOKLYN.** Doug Henwood, editor of the *Left Business Observer*, leads a Bob Fitch-inspired walking tour hitting all the hotspots and explaining the strategic machinations behind the transformation. A benefit for the Marxist Education Project. Meet at Hungry Ghost Cafe inside the BRIC Media Arts Media House, Bklyn [marxedproject.org](http://marxedproject.org)

**FRI MAY 22–SAT MAY 23**

7:30pm • \$15  
**MUSIC: AFRO DREAMFEST.** Celebrate African Liberation Day (May 25) at AfroDreamFest, an annual African touring concert celebrating Afro-fusion genres, including Afro-beat, Afro-soul, Afro-rnb and Afro-jazz. \$10 early bird tickets available. Fri: Meridian 23, 161 W 23rd St  
Sat: Silvana, 300 W 116th St [afrodreamfest.com](http://afrodreamfest.com)

**SAT MAY 30**

11am • Free  
**RALLY & MARCH: FOR OSCAR LOPEZ RIVERA.** Supporters of the Puerto Rican nationalist political prisoner will mark the 34th anniversary of his incarceration

with a major mobilization in Harlem. Adam Clayton Powell Blvd & W 125th St [freeoscarnycmay30.org](http://freeoscarnycmay30.org)

**SAT MAY 30**

12:10–2:00pm • Free  
**LEFT FORUM PANEL: GRASSROOTS MEDIA IN AN INCREASINGLY DIGITAL WORLD.** All forms of media continue to migrate to the Internet. So how should grassroots media practitioners respond to the opportunities and challenges posed by these developments? And is there a potential upside to not fully embracing the digital age? *Independent* Executive Editor John Tarleton, WBAI Program Director Mario Murillo, Media Mobilizing Project Communications Director Milena Velis and Susan Galloway of Rochester Indymedia will discuss these questions in conversation with Todd Wolfson, author of *Digital Rebellion: The Birth of the Cyber Left*. There will be time for audience Q&A as well. John Jay College New Building 524 West 59th St, Room 1.108 [leftforum.org](http://leftforum.org)

**SAT MAY 30 & MON JUNE 1**

7pm • \$10  
**DISCUSSION: THIS CHANGES EVERYTHING: FOUNDRY DIALOGUES 2015.** These dialogues, inspired by Naomi Klein's book, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate*, will bring together an international group ranging from policymakers to artists to discuss the impact of climate change and our solutions for sustainability and a lasting planet. The Foundry Theatre 140-142 2nd Ave [thefoundrytheatre.org](http://thefoundrytheatre.org) • 212-777-1444

**WED JUNE 3**

8–11pm, gates open at 6:30  
Free  
**MUSIC: CHAKA KHAN.** Celebrate Brooklyn! is kicking off its 37th year at the Bandshell with the Queen of Funk, Chaka Khan. The former Black Panther is

known for her soul grooves and soaring vocals in such hits as "I'm Every Woman" and "Ain't Nobody." Prospect Park Bandshell, near Prospect Park West & 11th St entrance [prospectpark.org](http://prospectpark.org)

**FRI JUNE 5**

6pm • Free  
**FIRST FRIDAYS: BLACK GAY PRIDE EDITION.** Celebrate the Black LGBT community and its rich history as Pride month gets underway. There will be extended viewing hours in the Schomburg galleries and music to groove to by DJ Missy B and Craig Nice and DJ Byrell. Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture 515 Malcolm X Blvd [nypl.org](http://nypl.org) • 212-491-2200

**SAT JUNE 6**

7:30pm • \$10 suggested donation  
**SCREENING: FINDING TATANKA.** With the Bay Area protest movements of the 1960s and 1970s as the setting, filmmaker Jacob Bricca documents his father and movement leader Kit Bricca's struggle to transition from an uncompromising idealist to a father and husband while his passion for social justice destroys his family. Followed by Q&A with the director. Maysles Documentary Center 343 Malcolm X Blvd [maysles.org](http://maysles.org) • 212-537-6843

**SAT JUNE 6**

10pm • \$15  
**PERFORMANCE: HYPER-GENDER BURLESQUE: MYTHICAL CREATURES.** In honor of June Pride, Hyper-Gender Burlesque presents Mythical Creatures, a celebration of queerness and all things different. Things will get hot, and don't forget your glitter. WOW Cafe Theatre 59-61 E 4th St, 4th Fl [wowcafe.org](http://wowcafe.org) • 917-725-1482

**FRI JUNE 6–SAT JUNE 7**

8pm • \$20  
**PERFORMANCE: FOR COLORED GIRLS WHO HAVE CONSIDERED SUICIDE WHEN THE RAINBOW IS**

**ENUF.** This Tony-nominated and Obie-winning choreopoem was written by Ntozake Shange in 1974, and is only the second play by a black woman to open on Broadway. It's now being revisited by the Serious Play Theatre Ensemble; the performance depicts the lives of seven women in a racist and sexist society through a series of poems choreographed to music. Judson Memorial Church 55 Washington Sq S [judson.org](http://judson.org) • 212-477-0351

**WED JUNE 10**

6:30–10pm • Free  
**BOOK DISCUSSION: A CONVERSATION WITH ROBERTA GRATZ.** Author Roberta Gratz will discuss her book, *We're Still Here Ya Bastards*, examining the rebuilding and revitalization of New Orleans 10 years after Hurricane Katrina. The New School Theresa Lang Community and Student Center, Arnhold Hall 55 W 13th St [newschool.edu](http://newschool.edu) • 212-229-5000

**THUR JUNE 11–SUN JUNE 21**

Various times • Various  
**FILM FESTIVAL: HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH.** 28 screenings of 19 acclaimed, feature-length documentaries that examine themes of war and peace, social justice and how to make change against all odds. Movies being screened include *Cartel Land*, *The Yes Men Are Revolting* and *The Black Panthers: Vanguard of the Revolution*. Walter Reade Theater at Lincoln Center, 165 W 65th St The Times Center, 242 W 41st St IFC Center, 323 Sixth Ave [ff.hrw.org/new-york](http://ff.hrw.org/new-york)

**TUES JUNE 16**

7–9pm • \$25, \$15 students/seniors  
**DISCUSSION: WITH LEGENDARY FILMMAKER WERNER HERZOG.** Werner Herzog is one of the most influential filmmakers in New German Cinema and has produced, written and directed more than 60 films,

including *Cave of Forgotten Dreams* and *Encounters at the End of the World*. NYPL Main Library, Celeste Bartos Forum 5th Ave at 42nd St [nypl.org](http://nypl.org)

**WED JUNE 17**

7–9pm • Free  
**DISCUSSION: YOUTH #BHEARD: FIGHTING FOR A VOICE COMMUNITY TOWN HALL.** Join this discussion of panelists, including journalists, council members and youth organizers to connect with the contemporary issues facing urban youth today, especially in the wake of sensationalized media coverage of the Baltimore uprising. BRIC Arts 647 Fulton St, Bklyn [bricartsmedia.org](http://bricartsmedia.org) • 718-683-5600

**SAT JUNE 20**

11–3pm • Free  
**FESTIVAL & DANCE WORKSHOP: LOCK, BRUKUP, FLEX AND JUMP AT THE UMOJA EVENTS JUNETEENTH FESTIVAL.** Dance workshops led by street dance pioneers will demonstrate and teach the evolution and a mix of dance styles born on the streets of Brooklyn and influenced by the dancehall and brukup style of Jamaica. No experience necessary! Linden Park, Bklyn Vermont St btw Linden Blvd & Stanley Ave [brooklynartscouncil.org](http://brooklynartscouncil.org)

**SAT JUNE 20**

1pm • Free  
**STREET PARTY: MERMAID PARADE.** Join thousands of New Yorkers in journeying to Coney Island for the 33rd annual Mermaid Parade, a celebration of ancient mythology and honky-tonk rituals of the seaside featuring more than 1,500 creative performers, including this year's Queen Mermaid and King Neptune. Starts at W 21st St and Surf Ave, Bklyn [coneyisland.com/programs/mermaid-parade](http://coneyisland.com/programs/mermaid-parade)

**RETURNING TO THE SEA:** This year's Mermaid Parade is on June 20.

**LEGEND:** Chaka Khan, the Queen of Funk, will perform at the Prospect Park Bandshell on June 3.



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